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The Old man's  
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| <p>AUTHOR</p> <p>MORGAN, W. DE.</p>                        | <p>CLASS FICTION<br/>RESERVE</p> |
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# The Old Man's Youth

THE WORKS  
OF  
WILLIAM DE MORGAN

JOSEPH VANCE

ALICE-FOR-SHORT

SOMEHOW GOOD

IT NEVER CAN HAPPEN AGAIN

AN AFFAIR OF DISHONOUR

A LIKELY STORY

WHEN GHOST MEETS GHOST

THE OLD MADHOUSE

LONDON : WILLIAM HEINEMANN

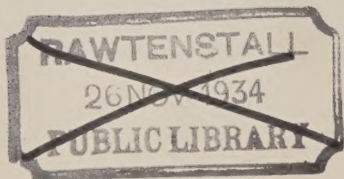
# The Old Man's Youth

*N. Dem*  
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By

William de Morgan

Author of "Joseph Vance," etc.



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LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

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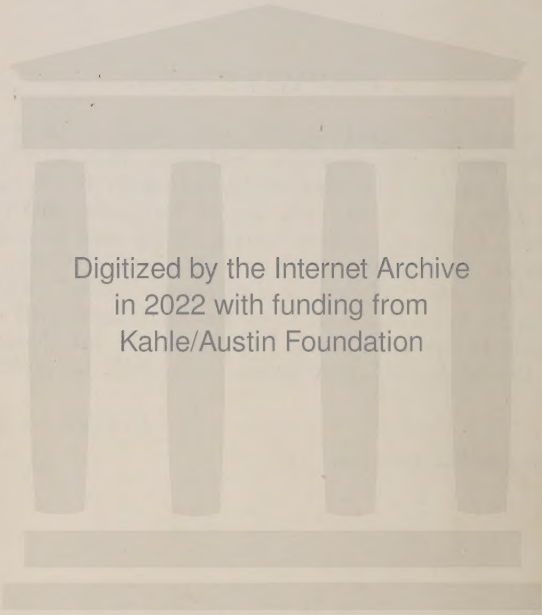


## PREFATORY NOTE

THIS novel was unhappily left unfinished at the time of my husband's death. His intention had been that all the incidents of the story should be presented to the reader in the narrative of Eustace John. As he did not live to carry out this idea I have been forced to supply a short setting of my own to make what he had written intelligible. This I have termed "The Story" as distinct from the "Narrative of Eustace John," which is left exactly as he wrote it. I have endeavoured merely to construct a framework founded on what I knew to be his general idea in writing the book, and to obtrude it as little as possible on the reader.

EVELYN DE MORGAN.

127 CHURCH ST., CHELSEA.



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# CONTENTS

|   | PAGE |
|---|------|
| CHAPTER I                               |      |
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 1    |
| CHAPTER II                              |      |
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 18   |
| CHAPTER III                             |      |
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 26   |
| CHAPTER IV                              |      |
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 33   |
| CHAPTER V                               |      |
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 44   |
| CHAPTER VI                              |      |
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 49   |
| CHAPTER VII                             |      |
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 57   |
| CHAPTER VIII                            |      |
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 70   |
| CHAPTER IX                              |      |
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 79   |
| CHAPTER X                               |      |
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 86   |
| CHAPTER XI                              |      |
| THE STORY . . . . .                     | 102  |

## CHAPTER XII

|                    | PAGE |
|--------------------|------|
| THE STORY. . . . . | 105  |

## CHAPTER XIII

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| THE STORY. . . . . | 108 |
|--------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XIV

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 111 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XV

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 123 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XVI

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| THE STORY. . . . . | 138 |
|--------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XVII

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| THE STORY. . . . . | 140 |
|--------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XVIII

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 142 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XIX

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| THE STORY. . . . . | 160 |
|--------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XX

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 163 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XXI

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| THE STORY. . . . . | 177 |
|--------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XXII

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 179 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XXIII

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 197 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XXIV

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 212 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XXV

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 235 |
|---|-----|



# CONTENTS

ix

## CHAPTER XXVI

PAGE

|                     |     |
|---------------------|-----|
| THE STORY . . . . . | 251 |
|---------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XXVII

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 253 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XXVIII

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 269 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XXIX

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 280 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XXX

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 296 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XXXI

|                     |     |
|---------------------|-----|
| THE STORY . . . . . | 316 |
|---------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XXXII

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 319 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XXXIII

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 339 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XXXIV

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 362 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XXXV

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 384 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XXXVI

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 397 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XXXVII

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 409 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 420 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XXXIX

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 435 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XL

PAGE

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 447 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XLI

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 460 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XLII

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 476 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XLIII

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN . . . . . | 491 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER XLIV

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| THE STORY. . . . . | 503 |
|--------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XLV

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| THE STORY. . . . . | 508 |
|--------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XLVI

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| THE STORY. . . . . | 512 |
|--------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XLVII

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| THE STORY. . . . . | 516 |
|--------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XLVIII

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| THE STORY. . . . . | 520 |
|--------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER I

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

I GAVE my Self up, as a bad job, long ago. By a bad job, I mean an insoluble problem. I have asked my Self to explain *itself* for sixty years at least—maybe more—and have never got a satisfactory answer.

Personally, I am unable to explain my Self. The most I can achieve is a poor make-believe that I can get away from it at arm's length—far enough at any rate to walk round it and note its outward seeming. The result is an image in my mind of an old man who is tired, and wants to stop. Not to stop writing, mind you! not to stop any particular thing—but to stop altogether.

Because then, you see, he would be on all fours with every non-existent person in the Universe. And think of the improvement in his position! No pain at all!—think what that would mean to his joints, which are arthritic. No eyesight at all!—think what that would mean to eyes that see nothing they welcome. No memory at all!—and what a gain that would be, seeing that all that was sweet in the Past serves now only to add bitterness to the Present, and all that was bitter defies oblivion, and lives to sting in all its freshness, as though no yesterdays had come between. How much better, he thinks, to have done with it all, and be no worse off than the countless myriads that have never been born. Provided always his extinction were complete and guaranteed: no treachery on the part of Nonentity towards a tired unit in an infinite void, a Creation that has had, for him, so little purpose, a Creation whose benefits, if they exist, he grudges to no survivor.

Do not suppose I have not reasoned with my Self—pointed out that this longing to cease is at least irreligious, if not illogical. Indeed, I have gone further, and assured it that its non-existence is, to *itself*, a thing quite inconceivable, although *my* higher reasoning powers have enabled me to perceive its possibility.

I have told my Self this plain truth, but it still remains, as at first, a thing unintelligible, saying it knows nothing of what is not conceivable, has only a simple wish—namely, to be no worse off than my elder brother; my brother who has never had a heartache nor a toothache. How could he, seeing I am the only son of my

parents? For there is no safeguard against pain, that non-existence cannot give points to, and win.

Can I blame my Self? Am I the person to do it? Certainly not for being unintelligible, for am *I* intelligible? Are you prepared to say *you* understand me? Shall I believe you, if you do, seeing that by my own admission I do not understand my Self?

Yet, though I do not, and though, as I began by saying, I have given my Self up as a bad job long ago, I often ask it questions. I have asked it more than once lately, what can I find for it to do, that will keep it quiet and prevent it worrying me? For it is not I that always worry it, whatever the conventions of speech may suggest to the contrary. And if the answers I have received only entrap me into a painful task, that I shall fling aside not long hence incomplete, I have only my Self to blame for it. For I have consulted no one else, and have no intention of doing so.

I have questioned my Self further about this task—no less a one than the jotting down of all the memories of my lifetime. I have asked it how far I dare to do this—going back on all my buried memories: dwelling again on so many half-forgotten passages of our joint lives, so many I would gladly forget outright. I have said to it, “Can I—can *we*—speak our thoughts aloud, although none other hears our speech, of all we now know to have been folly, or worse? Can I confess to *you* my shame or remorse for a hundred blots on the page of life that never would have soiled it had the writer’s hand held a less uncertain pen? Can I, above all, write truth about the faults of those I loved in their despite?

The answer to this question has been that it doesn’t matter, that they are all dead and gone, long ago, and will never know anything about it. And this has been followed by an intimation to me not to make a fuss about nothing.

But is it nothing? That’s the question. What’s the answer? Will they,—do they—of necessity, know nothing about it? I cannot help admitting to my Self that I am far from cock-sure on the point; conceding to cocks their proverbial amount of prophetic certainty. However, no one will ever know what I write—that’s one comfort! And surely I may be allowed to amuse my Self. Consider how dull are the hours it has to pass; think what a total theirs may be before the last, last, last one comes with the order of release! Some septuagenarians are incorrigible—they drag on to eighty—ninety—get into their teens again sometimes—their second teens.



Anyhow, I can't restrain my Self. It will have me write down all we can recollect, between us. Surely if I am to employ my Self at all, I may as well do it in a way that will make the employee happy and keep him amused. All benevolent taskmasters do this, to the best of their ability.

When I turn to, seriously, to examine my Self about its share in our joint recollections, it is not with any idea that it will add to my own. It may confirm them. I doubt my having to contradict it.

What is my earliest recollection? A many of us have asked *their* Selves this question and got no answer worth calling one. Mine answers me, and we are both of a mind.

It is of the Nursery in Mecklenburg Square. . . . *What* nursery?—did I understand you to ask? *My* nursery, of course! What other nursery was there ever in Mecklenburg Square? . . . and the day the Sweep came in the afternoon. Actually in the afternoon—*why*, Heaven knows! The clue is lost—irrevocable. But there he was, black and terrifying, in broad daylight instead of coming clandestinely before dawn—official dawn—and piercing strong-lunged into the heart of unsuspecting dreams with the wail of a lost soul. And there was I, very small, and four or thereabouts; I my Self, that have survived to write this now, or I could not have seen what happened, and remembered it through a lifetime.

And I do remember it plainly, believe what you may! The kneeling Sweep brings his brush down the chimney—it was up as my memory took form—discarding rod after rod as each comes from under a soot-curbing petticoat forethought has clothed the grate with. He comes to the critical moment that is to bring his brush back into Society, and suppresses the petticoat, with caution. Then, out comes the brush, and upon it—it is true, this that I tell you; honour bright!—is a sweet white pigeon, very little soiled by its journey through the soot. And the last my memory sees is the black Sweep—oh, how black he was!—caressing the white bird as he kneels before the grate; and, as I infer now, open-mouthed with astonishment. Else how come I to retain so vivid an image of a very red tongue in the middle of a very black face? There my memory's eyesight fails and sees no more. But I know I saw it, and have described it truly, though I was four. And the reason I know I was four is that when in later years I recalled the incident, I was told I must be telling stories, because I was only four when the event—honourably acknowledged—came about, and I could not possibly recollect it. But I knew better.

I may remember something else as early, but I cannot prove the

date. Unless indeed it is a confectioner's shop with a bride-cake of some pretensions in the window, which my sisters and I were allowed for a treat to gaze at when we were taken out, to bowl our hoops under tyrannical restrictions. This cake held me with a cruel fascination, not as a cake to be cut—that would have been blasphemy—but as a type of Oriental splendour, The Court of Tamerlane, anything of that sort! When in later years I learned “Ye Mariners of England” by heart, I found that, in connection with the meteor-flag that would yet terrific burn, my mind dwelt with satisfaction on the tin flag stuck in it. But it is nothing in the nature of its enchantments that enables me to fix the period of life when I came under this cake's spell. It is the railing the shop stood back from, the top bar of which I was not to climb up to and suck; or Varnish, my nurse, would tell my mar. It was above the level of my mouth—I can remember the taste fairly well—and I must have been full small, to be unable to enjoy it on the level of the pavement.

Was Varnish really my nurse's name? I have accepted it as such all my life, but now I come to write it, I must make the reservation that I do not believe it can have been her name, or anybody's. I shall never know now what her name really was; it is all so long ago. I do not even know, and I only puzzle myself by speculating, whether she was christened Varnish, or whether it was the name of her family.

I have often tried, by the light of much subsequent experience of the genesis of the human domestic, to figure to myself the terms on which Varnish came to be the power she was in my family circle. I have forced myself mechanically to grapple with the conception of her as a candidate for a nurse's place, going through prescribed formulas, producing written characters, failing to convince with them, being spoken for by a lady in a suburb previously unknown to man, having her relations with alcohol canvassed without disguise, and her attitude towards the opposite sex safely defined; her honesty in money matters and truthfulness of speech candidly discussed and her seeming satisfactory so far, and, finally, her coming for a month on trial and giving satisfaction; all these conditions I have endeavoured to imagine Varnish into, and have failed utterly. She still presents herself to me as a Power in Nature, with a bone in her stays, combining Omnipotence with a mysterious liability to come unpinned, and reinstating her position with pins produced from a recess in her mouth. To a youthful mind awaiting Theism, but taught to say prayers provisionally, she was not without her uses; filling out a void in which, other-

wise, irreverent speculations might have germinated. But as to her having ever gone to a registry-office and sought domestic employment, that seems even now to my inner soul impossible, for all that reason and subsequent experience have taught me.

Why Varnish used threats to tell my mar, in order to influence me, I can't say. It was a case of a weak Ministry and a strong Executive, I suppose; the latter metaphorically brandishing the former over the heads of malefactors, as the only type of abstract authority available. I was too young to analyze; so I accepted the confidence of her denunciations as a sign that they were well grounded, and asked no questions as to the form the Action of the Government would take. Varnish must often have felt very grateful to me for stopping crime short of forcing her to carry out her threats and exposing their impotence. No doubt she breathed freer when concession on my part enabled her to dwell on my good fortune in escaping some form of torture undefined, which a retributive mother would certainly have resorted to, though Varnish's own tender soul shrank from thumbscrews or the rack. "But just let me find you put the butter in the slop-basin again," said she, "and see if I don't acquaint your mar! Such goings on I never!"

I should not like to say that my mother was not fond of me, but I am convinced there was a coolness between us, dating from my entry into this world, for which I think she should not have held me responsible. Varnish no doubt handled this estrangement—used it as a lever to coerce me into moral courses. Her action produced two false impressions on me; one that my mother was a strong character, the other that my father was a weak one. His ostentatious exclusion from a seat on the Bench beside my mother *could* only have one effect, even if unendorsed by running commentary on his demeanour as a parent, which I suppose Varnish never meant to reach my understanding. Or rather, she made her assumption that it could not do so a pivot for her conscience to turn its back upon me with, and say whatever it liked to Space, whose sympathies she seemed to take for granted. But a sharp little boy of five or six is sometimes hideously sharp about whatever touches his own interests, and when Varnish said to Space that my father set her off wonderin', he did, and what that child would do next she couldn't imagine!—that being her style, which I can't help—her saying so made me alive to the fact that I had a friend at court, under whose ægis I might defy the authorities. In this case he had, to the best of my dim recollection, countenanced and encouraged me in retiring under the Wash, or more properly

under the miscellanea which were yearning for the Wash, in the basement of a cupboard named The Dirty Close, or Clothes; it having acquired, by a retroversion of language, the name of its contents. Once concealed, every addendum from the sorted heaps on the floor which I had not been permitted to roll in, improved my position of security, while it increased my risks of suffocation. I was saved, to become an object of opprobrium to all but my father, who laughed. But such like incidents as this built up a reputation for him in my eyes—a reputation of sympathy with revolution—although it did not convince me that he could be relied on at a crisis. Varnish's habit of soliloquy was responsible for this, as it was for the groundless belief in my mother's strength of character.

I was very young then. Had it dawned upon me, I wonder, that my father was in Somerset House? If not, it must have done so very soon after, for I knew it at six years old; seeing that I remember telling a neighbour of it, as a fundamental truth of nature that could make shift for itself without meaning anything intelligible. For I had not the remotest idea what Somerset House was, nor what my father did there. I am not much clearer now, on this latter point. But I have known all my life, and I told that little girl clearly, with some sense of reflected glory, that my father *was* in Somerset House, past all question. She did not seem impressed, merely inquiring of me whether I was a little boy or a little girl. Her name was Ada Fraser, and she lived in the house with the red blinds, right across the Square. Why do I feel now, at a distance of sixty-five years, that if you, my reader, do not know which the house with the red blinds was, your ignorance argues yourself unknown? Why—Europe knew it!

By the time I was six years old—the time at which my memories begin to solidify—I not only knew that my father was in Somerset House, but that his salary was too small. I did not know then that this piece of knowledge is common to all mankind about its own salary and that of its belongings. It remains true in spite of periodical rises. Even so the path in which a serpent moves is an unvarying mathematical curve, while the snake himself constantly advances, like the salary.

I cannot say I ever heard my father complain that his salary was too small, but he must have thought so, for, was he not human? I knew all about it—of that I am certain—and felt indignant, long before I knew what a salary was.

The most vigorous complaints of the inadequacy of this salary came from my mother's two younger brothers, known to me as Uncle Francis and Uncle Sam. My mother's discussion of the



subject with my father, in which she would lay great stress on the difficulties of housekeeping for such an immense family, in such a huge house, always ended with:—"Well, Nathaniel, ask my brothers what *they* think. All I say is, ask my brothers!" On which my father would fume and become irritable, and my mother would sit with her eyes shut, and if he became at all demonstrative and independent, would have that dreadful faintness come over her again, and would tell my nurse or my elder sister to give her just one spoonful of Dr. Endicott's mixture—only one!—in a wine-glass of water nearly full up, but not full enough to spill.

Uncle Francis was in the Inner Temple—at least, that was how he was described to me; and I accepted the Inner Temple, just as I accepted Somerset House. But with a difference. I had, so to speak, worshipped at the Inner Temple's shrine. Make peace with Wordsworth for me, if ever you meet him in the Unknown. I had been more than once taken to the Inner Temple by my mother; and when it rained, instead of being turned loose in the garden with my two elder sisters, while my mother talked about an important mystery called the Settlement, we were taken into my uncle's chambers and allowed to overhear much conversation about it. Memory is a funny thing! I remember this conversation quite distinctly; not its components, but the fact of its existence. Otherwise, I can only recollect a torrent of unqualified jargon with a fish-leap—suppose we call it—or an islet now and again, to vary its purposeless monotony. As for instance when my uncle inhaled snuff—it vanished up his nostrils in two long gusts—recrossed his slippers two or three times, helped Chaos forward a little among the papers on his desk, and said to my mother with a raised voice:—"You may talk till you're hoarse, Cæcilia, but don't try to convince me that Nathaniel's a Lawyer. I know better. You ask anybody! They'll tell you so at any club in London." It is odd that I remember all these words, for I cannot have understood them. Witness the fact that at the next opportunity I asked my mother where her horse was, and she said—no wonder!—"What can the strange child mean? Do make out, Varnish!"

These visits to my uncle's chambers are responsible for an impression that has lasted my lifetime up to this moment of writing, and that probably will hold good to the end of it. It bonds together—like the items of a Welsh Triad, or the identities of the threefold Hecate—the atmosphere of snuff, the noiselessness of slippers, and the solitude of Chambers. I have often endeavoured to break the spell that holds these three things together and to think of them apart. But it remains just as strong as ever! The

recollection of his snuff comes, as a special flavour, through the memory of the very strong tobacco smoked by Mr. Tom Skidney, a great friend of his, who was frequently in evidence, but unexplained. That of the slippers asserts itself through a flowered silk dressing-gown in which, as I understood, my uncle conveyanced. And the belief that Man, in Chambers, is a sort of Anchorite, separated from his species, predominates over a fact that I perfectly well call to mind, that not only Mr. Skidney was always there, with an amber mouthpiece in his lips, but also two other young men who appeared at intervals and accepted from him what I supposed to be *his* cigars. They really were my uncle's.

These young men were up in the top set—which is all I ever knew of them. But whatever they were, they did not want to have anything conveyanced. On the contrary, they themselves were yearning to conveyance the goods of others. Now Mr. Skidney, as far as I could make out, toiled not, neither did he conveyance. He resided in the Inner Temple, and he smoked. Every one of us makes some contribution to the sum-total, of active human life, and that was Mr. Skidney's. My uncle seemed to think that he accounted for him, or palliated him, when he said of him: "Oh—yes—little Kidneys! *He's* all right—has some means of his own." But whatever his means were, and whatever the ends to which he used them, neither he nor those fellows in the top set ever did anything towards dissipating the idea that Chambers meant loneliness. I had heard the words "all by himself in Chambers" before I knew that words meant things; and by the time I had decided on the meaning of this combination, it had become a fundamental fact in nature, like the Butcher, or the Baker, or the Dust. So the snuff, the slippers, and the solitude still remains in my mind as the insignia of my Uncle Francis.

My Uncle Sam was a Civil Engineer, and him too I swallowed whole and was content to know nothing of the nature of Civil Engineering. To my mind it merely presented itself as something great—something outside and beyond daily life, mysteriously actuated from the inmost heart of an unimpeachable Office. Even so Genghis Khan—or somebody like him; I really forget—played with armies on a chessboard, in miniature, and made it all happen in reality, hundreds of miles away, while he basked in the smiles of beautiful female captives, who fanned him and gave him pomegranates. Uncle Sam had no captives or pomegranates. But then, to tell the truth, I don't believe any of the great events at a distance had any parallel in his case. My opinion now is that he built himself a certain reputation by sending in designs, and tendering

for gigantic jobs that were never accepted. Nothing could be more impressive than the way in which he would ring a bell with a button on the office table, and summoning his clerk, whose name was Marigold, would ask him had *we* tendered for this job. One of my earliest images of him shows him to me throwing a letter across the office table to Mr. Marigold, with this inquiry. I conjecture now that his only motive in doing so was to impress my mother, who was on a visit to him accompanied by my youngest sister, a little girl three years my senior, and myself. I was older then by a couple of years than the infant I recollect being, in the dirty-linen cupboard enduring suffocation with the low motive of occasioning domestic confusion. I was by this time taking shrewd notice of the world my mother could have dispensed with my presence in, and was quite competent to understand her conversation with my Uncle Sam. They were talking about my father's salary. They generally did. And their talk led, as always, to a review of my father's character.

"You—mark—my—words, Cæcilia," said Uncle Sam, leaning back in his important office-chair, which was on castors—one of the sort that pushes back suddenly, unless you know, as he did, how to avoid it. He closed his eyes to emphasize an Oracular character. Also to think of his words—because I don't believe he had done so.

"I know!" said my mother under her breath, with a slight inclination of the head in pre-confirmation of the Oracle. Not to be caught out by any one else making a bid for Omniscience!

"You—mark my—words!" repeated my uncle. "It's goin' to be Sawcrates over again. What did I say to Nathaniel before? I said Sawcrates, but it doesn't matter who. Any philosophical old chap. Any old buzzock in a book."

"I know," said my mother again. And again she nodded, as before. But she did it with a certain condescension of pity, for the educational defects of younger brothers. My uncle went on to develop and improve his position:

"Or Simple Simon. Or Corduroy—Croydon—what's his name? *You* know—you're up to that sort of trap—in Arcadia——"

My mother looked puzzled for a moment, and then, to her credit, guessed right. She had read a little of one or two of the Classics, and thought she had read the whole of most, as well as a little of all the others. Corydon and Phyllis was the answer to the riddle.

"Ah—and Fillies!" said Uncle Sam—who was a good judge of horse-flesh. "Anythin' in the Pastoral Symphony line. Anythin' in books. But for a Man of the World—to look after his property—put his little capital out to advantage—know what to buy and

when to sell—why, there's little Marigold out there would give him half the course, and come in at the winning-post, as fresh as fippence." My uncle seemed discontented with this analogy; for after thinking a few seconds with his eyes shut he corrected it to "As fresh as tomorrow mornin'." My mother appeared to submit.

The astute Marigold had been audibly referring to several folio volumes in his private kennel, and now returned with the negative information. "No particulars, so far!" He seemed unwilling to admit the existence of transactions his employer had no hand in. But he accepted "Very good—cut along!" as permission to dismiss the subject, and did it without emotion.

My uncle, disturbed for the moment in his homily, reclosed his eyes to continue it, with the words "Let's see!—what was I sayin'?" . . . oh, ah—your husband, Cæcilia! There's a man now!—could have put down his ten thousand pounds at this moment, and very little the worse for it, if he'd only have listened. But that's where it was—he wouldn't listen!"

My mother shook her head over my father, sympathetically. "If he had only paid attention to you, Samuel," said she. "Or to Francis."

But Uncle Sam could only give a qualified countenance to Uncle Francis. "Barristers are middlin'," said he. "But they ain't always practical men. Such a man as Dale Smith now! Why—I could have asked Nathaniel to meet him at dinner, times out of mind. Or Tracey 'Awkins—ask 'em about him in the City—see what *they*'ll say! Or Sparrer Jenkins, porter-bottlin' man! Any man of that sort. They're your sort. Nothin' sentimental about them. But it's no use talking to Nathaniel—you know 'im, Cæcilia." My uncle spoke in a way peculiar to himself, as though he were falling asleep though intelligent, and was too lazy to pick up an H he had dropped of set purpose.

I need not say that much of what I write may be referred to later experience. But I really was taking in a great deal of what I saw, considering my years, I am puzzled myself at my own range and strength of recollection.

Looking back now, from my present standing point of experience, I cannot the least understand on what grounds these two uncles of mine claimed a worldly sagacity superior to my father. They were considerably his juniors; but that I then looked on, at my mother's suggestion I fancy, as an advantage on their side. This was not only because the intelligence of their youth was crisper, my father being several years their senior, but because monetary success is more convincing in the young, who manifestly must be



practical men, up to the ways of the world,—able to cheat you if they choose, but restrained from doing so by the inexpediency of fraud—if they have already begun to fill their own coffers. Whereas the coffer-fillings of middle-life and old age may be the result of mere dull industry, and something may actually have been given in exchange for them. But then, as well as being younger, my uncles' educations ought (as I now think) to have caused my mother to pause in her decision as between her brothers and her husband, that the latter was always wrong. They did not, rather the contrary! My father's very respectable career at Cambridge was engineered—not very civilly—to his disadvantage, and it was impressed on my infant mind that the Mathematics, towards which he had had a leaning from boyhood, crippled the Student for the race in Life, and fostered a certain character difficult to define, owing to the variety of its constituents, but fatal to the shrewdness that qualifies for worldly success. For it seemed that they—and the Classics also—tended to produce Shepherds, Philosophers, and Parsons, but not Men of the World.

I am convinced now that my uncles' function, in the predestined order of events, was that of irritants. Their scheme, if they had one, was to goad my father to action, with a view to "making money," somehow, but it kept cautiously clear of indicating definite courses. There was, however, one thing they were agreed about—that the first step for him to take was to give up Somerset House. That house was to them as a red rag to a bull, and they denounced it until my mother came to identify it with Poverty, and pictured it to herself as a huge obstacle standing between my father and some source of gold undefined, preferably in the City.

"You will never get on, Nathaniel," she would say, after stimulus from her brothers. "You will never get on, until you give up Somerset House. My brothers both say so. And Samuel mentioned more than one gentleman whose name is well known in the City, who said so too."

My memory supplies definitely, in one case of speech to this effect, an image of my father saying rather superciliously: "And what was the gentleman's name that was well known in the City, who said so too?"

My mother laid *Nicholas Nickleby* down in her lap, and folded her hands over him, to say fixedly:—"It's no use my telling you, Nathaniel. You will only sneer."

My father replied, "Oh no!—we won't sneer at the name of the gentleman that's well known in the City—will we, Eustace John? Out with it, Cæcilia!" Eustace John was the present writer.

My mother closed her eyes to reply, "Mr. Sparrow Jenkins. But I could name others." Her manner said:—"I will now await your paroxysm of scorn. But Truth will survive."

It certainly does seem to me now, if I remember the interview rightly, that my father *did* express a certain amount of disparagement of the gentleman so well known in the City. For what he said was:—"Mr. Sparrow Jenkins!—Mr. Griggs Jenkins!—Mr. Dobbles-boy Jenkins!!!—*What* does *he* know about me? What does *he* know about Somerset House?"

My mother nodded, slowly, expressing patience, toleration, inward knowledge with disclosure in due course at a time well-chosen. But for the moment she said only:—"Mr. Sparrow Jenkins, Nathaniel, knows enough to know that the sooner you quit Somerset House, the better for your family."

"Oho—that's it, is it!" said my father. "*He's* a nice young man for a small tea party. Come here, Eustace John . . . yes—sit a-horseback on my foot." I did so, lending myself willingly to a performance I enjoyed, and a fiction that I was a cavalry officer. It was dramatically unsound, for no cavalry officer ever takes hold of two human hands to keep him in his saddle. My father's held mine, and I knotted my legs together securely under his foot, having no stirrups, as he continued:—"What's the name of the gentleman?—Mr. Dobblesboy Jenkins? Yes, you say it, Eustace John! And mind you say it right, or the horse shan't go on." I said it to the best of my ability, and the horse went on, gently ambled, while my father continued:—"Yes, Mr. Dobblesboy Jenkins. Well, Eustace John, suppose we take Mr. Dobblesboy Jenkins's advice, and quit Somerset House, where's the bread-and-butter to come from meanwhile?" The horse broke into a gallop across country, causing its rider to laugh convulsively in a very unsoldierlike way, but leaving his mind free to form a false image of Somerset House as a source of bread-and-butter—not metaphorically, nor even independently of each other, but incorporated in slices, or fingers and thumbs.

How many a time have I said to myself, in after life, "Just like Uncle Sam," when I have heard it suggested that the surest way to the next rung of the ladder is to kick away the foothold underneath! And yet—the pleasure of it! If one could only have, morally, a moist Turkish bath and a splendid cold plunge, have one's hair cut and find a new suit of clothes in the dressing-room! . . . yes!—and the past forgotten and Hope ahead; throw that in! I suppose my father's taste for running after Jack-o'-Lan-thorns had never developed. To the best of my belief—at this time

at any rate—no suggestion of any new career for him after quitting Somerset House had ever been made.

My mother left *Nicholas Nickleby* on her lap, with his face down and her hands on his back, and waited for the ride to come to an end. It did, in time; my father saying as he released his foot from my prehensile legs: "There, that's enough for any young scaramouch, in all conscience." I thought not, but waived the point.

My mother then resumed:—"Mr Sparrow Jenkins, Nathaniel—but this I believe you perfectly well know—is not a person such as you may make me ridiculous before the child. . . ." She paused, in a difficulty with grammatical structure, but too proud to acknowledge it.

My father offered help, saying fluently:—"Not a legitimate object of ridicule for the benefit of Eustace John. I see. . . . Yes—go on."

My mother went on, freezingly:—"You need not interrupt me, Nathaniel. What I said was perfectly intelligible. And Mr. Sparrow Jenkins,—although you think it humorous to pervert his name—is not the only person of influence that believes you have great possibilities. But all are agreed on one thing—not Somerset House!"

"Several things are not Somerset House," said my father. "I could give instances. I admit, however, that the abstract idea 'not Somerset House' has a certain unity."

"Now you are talking nonsense, Nathaniel. I believe Varnish is right, and that sometimes you are not responsible. Would you ring that bell, please? Eustace John had better go to the nursery. She has done my lace on the Italian iron by now, and he's spoiling the carpet."

"Why is Eustace John to go to the nursery?"

"Manage the house yourself!" said my mother, severely. She contrived to clothe a resumption of *Nicholas Nickleby* with an appearance of abdication. I don't believe now—whatever I believed then—that she read a single word of it.

It is difficult to say if what I picture to myself as succeeding this is a true memory of what happened, or a superstructure of inferences, based on knowledge acquired later of my father's and mother's characteristics. If it is the former, I think I may lay claim to be the son of the most inconsequent mother of whom a record has survived.

For in reply to a remark—not an ill-humoured one—of my father's as he rang the bell, "You're a nice couple, you and



Varnish! So, I'm not *responsible*—is that it? Very good!" she merely said, affecting reabsorption in *Nicholas Nickleby*, "Can you wonder, Nathaniel?" A pause followed, during which I waited to hear my father answer the question. I was naturally anxious to know whether he could or couldn't answer. But no response came. My mother said:—"You know perfectly well what I am referring to, Nathaniel." And another pause followed, a longer one, at the end of which my father said:—"No, I don't."

My mother then, putting *Nicholas Nickleby* finally aside, seemed to step frankly forward into the arena of argument, as one compelled to speak. "Whatever," she said, "may be the views you profess to hold about my brothers; however much you may despise them and set aside their experience; whether or not you disregard the advice of their friends, Men of the World and qualified to speak; whether you think your wife a fool or not—of which I say nothing. . . . Oh yes!—you may say:—'Get along,' Nathaniel. . . . I do say this, and I always shall say, that nothing can justify your attitude about my grandfather's boxes in the lumber-room."

"I thought it would be those blessed boxes," said my father, to himself no doubt, but not inaudibly.

"What's that you said?" asked my mother, with spirit.

"I said 'I thought it would be those blessed boxes.' I understand that it was. What's the next article?"

"Do not evade my question, Nathaniel, but answer it. Are you prepared to justify your attitude about what you are pleased to call 'those blessed boxes?' Ring the bell again, hard! Varnish is an enormous time."

"My attitude being . . .?" My father had rung the bell hard and looked round to ask this question. His retention of the handle seemed to imply that he would not come off it till he was told about his attitude. So my mother had to tell him.

"Do not equivocate, Nathaniel. You know my meaning. For years you have opposed the examination of those boxes, and you are perfectly aware that their contents might prove both valuable and interesting. . . ."

"Very likely!"

"Then why place obstacles in the way of their examination? I wonder what Varnish is about."

"Who's placing obstacles?" said my father.

"That is uncandid, Nathaniel. I shall not answer you."

"All I ever said was—don't expect *me* to do it. They're inches thick in dust, and nailed down."

"My dear Nathaniel, is it likely I should ask you to do it? Have I not said, all along, that it is a job for a Man, by the day?" Then feeling that it might be put on a safer footing of economy, she added:—"Or at so much an hour. But beer on no account."

"Very well, then," said my father. "There you are! All you have to do is to tell your man to get the lids off, and then we can see what's in 'em. Only, he must be sober."

"You always leave everything to me," said my mother, uncomplainingly—how well one knows that manner of speech? "Varnish, what made you so long?" She did not wait for Varnish to add to an indication of her line of defence, that she came the very minute the bell rang, but told her to never mind now! Was tomorrow The Man's day? It appeared so. Could he be trusted to open those boxes in the lumber-room? Not with nobody there, Varnish testified. You couldn't hardly expect him to do it. But Mr. Freeman was always sober. And if there was any one to keep an eye, he could unpack boxes with a rare skill, hard to parallel. Just only to keep an eye on him, in case!

Mr. Freeman was the name of the man who had the day. His presence was accustomed to be manifested from below, on the days he claimed as his own, by the sound of a pump in the back-airy, followed by the music of a waste pipe when the cistern on the top storey was full up. Also by a sense of hoarseness diffused through the basement. His name perplexed me because I thought the last syllable was the source of my mother's designation for him. He was a very ancient institution in our house; but my mother always kept him at arms' length, and spoke of him distinctly as "The Man." I think she had cherished the idea that he would die away next week and give place to a superior substitute, ever since his first appearance on the scene, as long ago, I believe, as her first entry into the house, some twelve or thirteen years before.

"You might leave the child alone for one moment, Nathaniel, and bestir yourself to be of some use." So said my mother, and I wasn't grateful. For a paper bag my father was inflating, with an eye to a concussion, had to postpone the fulfilment of its destiny. But I was thankful to see that he retained control of that event, throttling the intake of the bag discreetly, as he said:—"Can't you let The Man get the lids off, and leave 'em for me to see. Some day soon—the next opportunity." Thereon my mother said:—"I knew it would be that," and guillotined the subject, with an affectation of final reabsorption into *Nicholas Nickleby*.

"What is the use of being unreasonable, Cæcilia?" said my father, and I hoped my mother would tell us. But she kept silence,

and my father continued:—"You know there's no holiday this month. Tomorrow, Saturday, I've an appointment with Dalrymple. Besides, Saturday is Saturday. And of course Sunday is Sunday." My memory detects a shrug in my father's shoulders here, as of secular shoulders entering a useless protest against rigid sabbatarianism.

Varnish had a happy faculty of perceiving situations and meeting difficulties. How fully all were aware that my father's shrug was really an impious suggestion, was shown by her thinking a fragmentary remark, "O'ny this once, and the young ladies all at Church!" sufficient to convey a hint that Sunday morning—even Sunday morning!—might be devoted to an inspection of these mysterious boxes.

Silence ensued and my father watched my mother. Varnish anticipated a protest on the score of The Man's religious sensitiveness. "Mr. Freeman he isn't that particular to the day, not to oblige," said she; and her meaning was clear, though her style defied analysis.

My mother was placed on the horns of a dilemma. She could gratify her religious instincts at the cost of delaying her inspection of the boxes, or get an early insight into their contents by sacrificing the observance of one Sunday. She saw a way to the latter alternative which would keep her personally free from blame, absolve her of rank impiety, and at the same time gratify a long-standing curiosity, by shifting the responsibility of Sabbath-breaking off on scapegoats. "I suppose," said she, "you must have your own way. Let it be Sunday morning." She entered into a programme or scheme of action with an interest which hardly warranted her final dismissal of the scapegoats into the wilderness. "I always have to give way," was her concluding remark. I thought that my father's manipulation of the bag, ending in a really noble report at this moment, had in it all the force of ratification.

Anyhow it was decided that The Man, Freeman, should get the tops off the boxes to the satisfaction of Varnish, and under her personal guidance and inspection; that the lumber-room's dust of ages should be abated by the tea-leaves of yesterday, and that in the absence of my sisters and their educational governess at St. George's Bloomsbury, my father and mother and myself—by special permission, at my father's request—should witness the actual disembowelling of these long-neglected receptacles, and make an examination of the contents. All this came to pass, and my mind still retains a vivid image of this attic in the roof overlooking

the Square, and the plane trees rising above the parapet outside its two windows, now opened for the first time for years; its sloped Mansard roof and ceiling with a trapdoor in it, rousing the curiosity of an infant mind to madness; and a *bouquet* which I think was Mr. Freeman, who had been for some time simmering in the heat when we came on the scene; with which was associated another flavour which I have since experienced in connection with sobriety, that of beer. Add to these, please, images of my father and mother keeping as much as possible out of the way of the dirt, and Varnish interposing on my natural disposition to get into it.

Looking back now, I sometimes find it hard to believe that all those boxes should have been warehoused for so long, unexamined, at intervals forgotten altogether. I should find it harder still, if I had not since known cases so nearly equivalent elsewhere. The worst memories of damp warehouses cannot keep Lethe water from the throats of those whose goods they have absorbed, at least where no accommodation rent is charged; then reminders come. And the mislaying of inventories, punctually and without fail, is one of the strongest distinguishing characteristics of the human race. I don't feel at all sure it is not the one that differentiates between ourselves and the anthropoid ape.

## CHAPTER II

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

OH dear—how dirty it all was! The contents of the box, I mean.

“Whoever packed this here box,” said The Man, “might just as well have stopped at home, according to my ideas.” From which I, being young, derived a false impression that no person inherent in any household could pack boxes, but was always dependent on assistance from experts. Also that The Man knew and we didn’t.

“It was packed at my grandmother’s at Peckham Rye,” said my mother with dignity, as one secure in her ancestral claims; but a little in awe of The Man, for all that. “It was packed before the Battle of Waterloo.”

“There you are!” said The Man. “There you have it. That’s how they did their packing, in them days. Wot did I say?” This added another impression to the store in my youthful mind, that the *casus belli* as between the opposing armies at Waterloo turned on methods of packing boxes, and that the triumph of my countrymen—I already knew we had won that battle—had established a higher standard for future ages.

“My dear,” said my mother, addressing my father. “The Man says this box is very badly packed.”

She had made a good deal of capital out of her heroic ascent of three flights of stairs, in defiance of a liberal supply of ailments, and a chair had been sent for to the nursery for her accommodation. This manœuvre helped to confirm a position she had captured for herself, as of one who countenances an escapade of a wilful husband, an indulged retainer, and an inexplicable Man. It compelled my father to an attitude of indecision, and made her assumption of the task of interpreter between him and The Man meritorious. He was outflanked, and could only stand feeling about on his face as if the modelling dissatisfied him. “Dear me!” said he. “Does it matter? Won’t the things come out?”

“They won’t come out of themselves,” said The Man. “They’ll have to be took. But you’ve only to say the word.”

“You hear, my dear, what The Man says,” said my mother.



"What we have to settle is—is the box to be unpacked or not?" Even my infant mind saw my mother's inconsistency when she added "Whichever you wish." For this referred the decision to my father.

He, with the whole responsibility on his shoulders, meditated before he replied, "The point is——" and came to a standstill. He seemed preoccupied with the modelling of his face. But when my mother said, "Don't make faces, Nathaniel," he became suddenly attentive and completed his remark, "The point is, if you do take 'em out, can you get 'em back again?"

"The Man can," said my mother. And my father seemed to revise or annul his statement of the point at issue, saying:—"I say leave 'em out of the box. If it was *me*, I should."

The Man said, "As easy shove 'em in as not!" and preserved a resentful silence.

My mother yielded herself a prey of despair. "You're no help, Nathaniel," she said. "You never are any help. Oh dear!"

My nurse interposed, saying, "Missis had better set," and introduced the supplied chair.

My mother, who sat down and said it was nothing, suffered patiently for some seconds from the affection, whatever it was, that Varnish's thoughtfulness had made her sit down about. During these seconds, it seemed, there had been interchange of thought between my father and Varnish, for he said to her, "Just a spoonful"—a valueless instruction taken by itself—and she provided what I conceive to have been "Dr. Endicott's Mixture" in a graduated glass. After a few more seconds, in which I wondered whether Dr. Endicott was better, or worse, than my mother, she revived, and the bill was brought up again for a second reading.

"As you object to The Man unpacking the box, my dear," said my mother, faintly, "it must be nailed down again, and put back."

Whereupon my father said, "Perhaps you had better get the things out, Freeman."

Varnish brought a cheerful optimism to bear, "If Mr. Freeman was to get them out, Mam, we should know what there was, another time. And, as I say, there's no harm in knowing."

"And The Man is very careful," said my mother, who was less faint.

"It's nothing, when you come to think of it," said Varnish. "Why, Mr. Freeman he'll be through it afore you can say."

"What I'm considerin' of," said Mr. Freeman, The Man, "is—where all these here things is to be stood. You pint out the place,

and I'll attend to it." He became aggressively motionless. I observed that by this *coup-de-main* he had secured the credit of scheming a plan of campaign, and at the same time devolved responsibility on every one else.

The respective merits of different proposals were then weighed. In the end my father put his eyebrows up in a puzzled way and left them up. If this was a forerunner of speech, it was baffled, for my mother said, "If I was allowed, I could direct," and closed her eyes, expressing readiness to endure even more. Varnish said *sotto voce*, "What I'm thinking of is Missis," meaning that my mother's nervous system under such trials was the source of her anxiety. My father brought his eyebrows down again.

Mr. Freeman said: "If it is to be took downstairs; say took downstairs. If it's to be kep' up here, say kep' up here. If it is to be division betwixt and between the two of 'em, name the proportions. It ain't for me to settle."

My father scratched his left cheekbone very slowly. "I cannot see," said he, "I cannot see——" But my mother stopped him. "You might wait, I think, this once, Nathaniel! Only this once! I won't ask you to wait again." Those were my mother's words, and to them my father replied:—"Well—well!" And felt his right cheekbone; comparing it with his left, I thought. Then my mother continued:—"The Man had better place the goods, as they come from the box, *carefully* upon the floor." By laying a marked stress on the word "*carefully*," she, I am sure, convinced herself that she was showing in the heart of Chaos great powers of direction and organization of a staff of employees viciously wedded to destruction, and insensible to discipline. Just as Maturity and Experience enjoin Prudence and Caution, but don't tell you what to do.

As I said, first thing, the contents of the box were dirty. It had distributed a flavour of decay when first opened. Now, the uprooting or detachment of the first parcel it contained caused a fume of old books to rise, tainted with another of interments; and perhaps a third, of mice and their habits. The Man was nearly omnipotent, according to Varnish. He could even undo the parcels and get the papers out of the way, seeing the mess; and a bit of clean noospaper would come in much handier, in the manner of speaking.

"Mercy my!" said Varnish, when she saw the first fruits of the box. "A murderer, with noomerals!" It really was a plaster head good to see your bumps by, with Benevolence and Self-Esteem and Philoprogenitiveness large, and Music and Language hardly worth having at all. But Varnish's experience of previous casts were connected with Madame Tussaud's.



"You might stand that on the chimney-piece downstairs," said my father.

"My dear!" said my mother. "*Afterwards!* It shall all be done in time, if you will *only wait!*" If I had not been so young I should have taxed my mother with breach of promise of patience.

My father had two identities; one the self that my mother had to a great extent overwhelmed during some twelve or thirteen years of married life, the other an uncrushed individuality which still came out in her absence, as Mr. Hyde asserted himself through Dr. Jekyll. Sometimes it took form furtively in undertones in her presence. His saying at this juncture, "Easy does it, Freeman. You'll break it," was an instance of this dual nature cropping up. But he had spoken too audibly; for my mother overheard him and said with some severity:—"My dear! The Man knows." Thereupon Dr. Hyde vanished, and Dr. Jekyll took his place; or *vice versa*, whichever was which in this case.

The Man was getting into difficulties owing to the very trenchant way in which this huge box had been packed, miscellaneous articles of all sorts seeming to have been incorporated in each other with a view to economy of space. Mysterious outlying portions of each accommodated themselves strangely to the forms of others; such as metallic handles, or outstretched limbs of sculptured indeterminates, Mænads or Satyrs as might be, resulting in a compacted mass which refused to come out except in bulk. The paper used in packing them appeared to have crept into the cavities, forming fibrous tissue such as makes good damage done to bone-structure; or makes it bad, as may be. One hopes!

"Whoever packed this here box," said The Man, after one or two efforts to disintegrate its contents, "did it with a heye to cromptication." My father touched a square parcel tied with string, imbedded in a corner, and said almost aside:—"Try that one." Mr. Freeman said approvingly:—"My dear!" He acted on it, and a square parcel was drawn out of its strings and cautiously relieved of its environments. My father identified it as an Orrery, and Mr. Freeman said:—"Ah, I should say that *was* wot it was." But by this he only meant to recognize the suitability of so contemptible a name for so objectionable a thing; not that he discerned any meaning in the first, or any purpose in the second.

My mother, however, murmured to Varnish: "You see! The Man knows." My father then said, meekly:—"Anyhow, it will be good for Eustace John." I had been forecasting advantages to myself from the investigations in progress and rejoiced at any acquisition.

comprehensible or not. I asked promptly, "Is that faw me?" and Varnish, as my official exponent, seized the opportunity to say, "On'y if you're good, Master Eustace, and don't spit in the bath!" referring to a recent passage of arms between us. . . .

I am continually conscious in all this, that I may be writing what I am convinced *must have been*, rather than an actual memory of what *was*. But the scene passes so vividly before me—whether it be my past itself, or a dream of it—that by the time I have cut my waning pencil, with a very old knife, The Man will seem to have unpacked the next parcel. I need not say that Sunday gear forbade intervention by other hands than his. Yes, there he stands—in my mind's eye, I mean—disrobing a heavy volume of an outer thick wrapper, and an inner thin one. Then he explains it, for our better apprehension.

"This here affair," said he, "is a book, and a big un at that. But if I was to tell you I could read it, I should be misleading of you, and no end gained." He passed the mammoth folio to my father, adding, "I never did set up for a scholar, nor yet I ain't a going to, at my time of life." This speech produced a curious impression on my mother, who thereafter suggested, more than once, that The Man could have read "*Herodoti Historia, editit Gronovius, sumptibus et typis et cetera.*" if he had chosen, but that his native modesty shrank from a pedantic parade of academical knowledge. My father looked at the beginning and end of the volume, and laid it on a chair. I thought he had read it through.

"What's the next article, Freeman?" said he. But my mother said:—"Do give The Man time, my dear." Then she shut her eyes and leaned back, to say:—"Always impatience!"

The next article was bronze statuary, such as I have hinted at. It caused Varnish to say:—"Oh my!—well I never!" Which was only because she was unsophisticated, not because any fault could have been reasonably found with either the nymph or the satyr, even if they had been on the same pedestal, which they were not. My father said, looking at them credulously:—"Those might be worth something." But he knew nothing about this department, as was shown before the box was empty.

Several things then came out of it, more especially a uniform with gold braiding, that had once been blue. My mother remarked that her grandfather was attached to his uniforms, and I knew language enough to picture them to myself as sewn on to the Rear-Admiral, whom I understood him to have been, during some portion of his earthly career; probably the latter, as our designations at death survive us. I heard this title for the first time, and

can remember quite well a distinct impression that it must have been a drawback to his rearing freely—for I only knew the term in connection with horses—if he was attached to his uniform. I must have been a clever child, to get involved in this way with my information. Stupid children fight shy of such ill-organized speculation.

But the Rear-Admiral's uniform was put aside after due appreciation, and bottles came to light—wide-mouthed bottles, sealed over the cork. They contained beans, chiefly—some, nice and shiny ones; and otherwise, nuts, powders, and amorphous things that might have been worth planting to see if they were roots. My mother remarked that her grandfather, when a post-captain, was for some time stationed in the Southern Hemisphere, and seemed to think this an explanation. My father said, "Oh ah!" and manipulated his countenance. I pictured to myself the Southern Hemisphere as brown and dry and rich in bottles.

The bottles were so big and round that they could lie in a row with two cylindrical leather cases, such as our forbears used to keep portcrayons in, only larger. Being opened, these were found to contain two pink vases, rather pretty. They received some admiration, and Mr. Freeman, The Man, said:—"If they was took to Campling's in 'Igh 'Olborn, they'd tell you the market value of these here to a 'apeny. Just you show 'em to Campling's!"

Varnish welcomed Campling's into the conversation; why—Heaven knows! She had seen the name over the shop, certainly. But this was no reason for so effusive an *accolade* to Campling's. "There now, Mam, didn't we see it only the other day?" But there was a greater marvel even than the recency of this observation of its frontage; namely, the perfect concord of The Man with my mother and nurse on the point of its whereabouts.

Said Mr. Freeman:—"Just you go along as far as Kingsgate Street and cross across. And then foller on no further than what you see the fire-escape. Then there you are!—Campling's."

Said my mother:—"That is perfectly right. I have seen the shop myself. On the *other* side of the way—not this side. It is between a pianoforte-maker's and a wholesale chemist's."

Said Varnish, irresistibly:—"Why, it's not above four minutes' walk after you pass the cab stand! You've only to go *straight* on and you *can't* miss it."

And then each underlined each several view expressed, in its several order, as follows:

"'Taint as if it warn't wrote up plain, Campling's. Any other name I'd have told you!"

"The pianoforte-maker is on *this* side; *not* the other. But my advice is *write it down*. (I know I shall not be attended to.)"

"Law, Missis, master can't miss it—starin' him in the face! And he can always ask a policeman." Then a short chorus of approval endorsed the policeman, as a sort of through-route glance-guide to the Universe.

By the time Campling's had been so long under discussion, its *raison-d'être* therein may have been overlooked. After all, it was only to be referred to as an authority on the market value of pink pots, if any. And this only on the strength of The Man's omniscience, for which the only warrant was his own *ipse dixit*. But I have learned since those days that great positiveness, accompanied by virgin ignorance, commands a reverence which the slightest evidence of information by the speaker would undermine altogether; even as the little pitted speck in garnered fruit soon makes us search for a bite in vain.

Several other things came out of the box. I remember a Malay Creese and a pair of ancient pistols which were afterwards responsible for some confusion when I came to read my Shakespeare. But of course my father's name for them was provoked by Bardolph's colleague, and stuck. I remember these because they were afterwards placed on the wall in the drawing-room, and spoken of, thenceforward, as having come out of "The Box." So was a serious Buddha from Japan in porcelain, who could bow and wave his hand for quite a long time, granted a *primum mobile*. Then there was a *Gardener's Chronicle*, twelve bound volumes of the John Bull newspaper, bundles of MSS. frightfully curled at the corners, and a Russian Zamovar whose tap waggled. My father said he would see to having it put in repair, and The Man said they would attend to anything of that sort at Bradbury's in Lambs Conduit Street. It might come to eighteenpence.

My mother appeared to be as it were possessed with a feverish desire, perfectly unaccountable, that my father should go forthwith to Campling's, to learn the market value of the little pink pots. Campling would know, and The Man knew he would know. The Man, for his part, aided and abetted by Varnish, persisted in giving my father encouragement, as an antidote to constitutional timidity of spirit. "*You won't find no difficulty*," said he. "Why, you can see 'em from across the road! And as for inquiries, Law bless you, they'll answer you anything you want to know, as soon as look at you." But, even as the Sphinx might have done under like circumstances, my father said, "Oh ah!—well, we shall see," and remained unmoved as far as Mr. Freeman's suggestions

went. But, unlike the Sphinx, when my mother said to him, "You might pay attention to what The Man says, my dear!" he replied meekly, "Certainly, my dear. certainly!" and appeared to climb down off his metaphorical equivalent of the Sphinx's pedestal.



## CHAPTER III

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

MR. HYDE must have got the upper hand of Dr. Jekyll when my father started with me, some mornings later, under promise to be sure and call at Campling's to make that inquiry. I have often puzzled myself to account for his freedom on that day from the thralldom of Somerset House. Why did I never question him on this point during his lifetime? I did not, and can only accept unchallenged my recollection of how we set out together, ostensibly for a walk, about an hour after breakfast. It seemed to me he stood committed to Campling's, especially as he carried in a brown paper parcel the two pink pots, tied up with stout string, very easy to undo without cutting, not to ask for any fresh at the shop. But we never went to Campling's, and its generosity was not presumed upon. And as for Mr. Hyde, no one knew anything about *him*, in those days.

But my mother knew of a Spirit of Contradiction which obsessed my father, and no doubt it was under its influence that he called a cab the moment he and I were out of sight of the house. For even my tender years knew that Campling's, being in High Holborn, was only a step. Possibly the same spirit actuated him when he said to the cab:—"I can't tell you where I want to go, because I've forgotten the name of the street."

The cab replied: "That don't concern me, so long as *you're* satisfied. Jump in, Governor!"

My father said:—"Suppose we try Pall Mall?—I rather fancy it's near Pall Mall."

"Histe the Little Governor in, and get in yourself," said the cab. "I've heard tell of Pall Mall, in my time." Whereupon my father hoisted me in and we were off.

It was my first experience of a hansom, and I appreciated it. And the consciousness of its newness is with me now; for it was a newborn cab, with new velvet seats, and such copal all over it as only coachmakers can buy. But even as the first bagpipes found a complete highlander to play them, so this cab, fresh from the hands of its maker, had lighted on a matured hansom cabman to drive it, who must have left the hands of *his* maker twenty odd



years before. In saying this, I am deferring to the popular cosmogenesis, and accepting the view that a hansom cabman—like you and me—though originally the work of God, is entirely indebted to Nature for his subsequent growth and development.

Am I right in my impression that in those early days of hansoms, when their life—and mine—was new, they laid claim, by implication, to familiarity with the Turf and the Fancy; that they struck a sporting attitude; affected intimacy with the Aristocracy; probably put the amount of their overcharges upon the Favourite? Am I wrong in supposing that they have grown meeker and meeker and meeker ever since those golden days, and that the poor crestfallen survivors of their glories are dying of Locomotor Ataxy, and very soon won't have a word to throw at a dog? Never mind if I have diagnosed a little wrong the fatal complaint that is destroying them. It's very plausible, anyhow!

I may be mistaken in my belief that in the years I had before me then, the sun shone brighter and the days were longer, the full moons were fuller and the nights warmer, the ways of men less iniquitous and the November fogs a cause for rejoicing, with which were associated squibs. It may have been an exaggerated view of Mecklenburg Square to account it the pivot of the Solar System; and possibly the organman who came Saturdays was a discordant organman when he played all the six tunes for twopence to my father's extreme annoyance; but he bore it for my sake. Perhaps even The Waits were unmusical! My faith has been so shaken in my old age about these idols of my youth, that I can believe almost anything. But that word "almost" leaves a corner in which I may still treasure intact an image of the hansom cab in the days of its early splendour, its confidence of unchanged prosperity in the years to come.

A little way from the entrance to this building where I write is a cabstand, or the ghost of one; and in my last familiarity with London streets, before I became bedridden, I used to note the spectres that hovered about it. They laid claim to be, or to have been, the drivers of these relics of a bygone day. There was one that was always there; he may be there still; but if he is, he will not be very long, unless he is, as may be, a real ghost now; and not a metaphorical one merely—for that was what I meant when I called him a spectre. He was a very, very old man; older than myself, by fifteen years. When he told me so—for I asked him his age and he made no secret of it—a thought passed through my mind that as far as years went he might be that very selfsame Jehu that drove my father and me in that resplendent vehicle to

St. James' Square, and hadn't change for a bull, which was in those days an obscure name for a five-shilling piece; but who, when my father said, "Then you'll have to do with two shillings," replied merely, "Chuck it up," and went his way contented, as one who could now and then despise mere dross. And that forlorn old cab, whose fractured shaft might with advantage have been re-broken and reset, whose harness had been made good and left bad so often, whose splash-board had been kicked in and confessed it, whose cushions' hearts had hardened and whose window stuck in the middle and wouldn't go up or down—this very cab was not so unlike that cab of old as I am now unlike the small boy that sat in it and saw for the first time the glorious spectacle of the Duke of York's column. For the driver stopped a moment to look at it, to oblige. And I feel, illogically, that his doing so has somehow given me time for all this about the two cabs, or the two phases of the same cab.

Just as I cannot, at this length of time, form any surmise as to how my father came to be a free-lance, clear of the Office, on that day, neither can I reconcile or explain many things that my memory insists on my believing. I can only accept them.

I am convinced for instance that a small boy, who may have been me, went up a stair, flanked by black figures which I have since failed to identify anywhere, and said to my father:—"When shall we go to Campling's?"

"Tomorrow or next day or the day after that," said my father, with what I have since understood to be effrontery.

"Yes, but which?" said the small boy, who really must have been me.

"Do you know what happened to Inquisitive Bob?" said my father. I intimated that I did not, but should be glad to hear. So he continued:—"Inquisitive Bob was sat on the hob. So now you know what happened to *him*, young man."

I reflected deeply, and framed a question, of which I cannot supply the pronunciation; so I do not know if my father was right when he mimicked it, repeating my words:—"Worse the fire lighted in the fire?" Of course it was. They made it roasting hot on purpose."

It was most unsatisfactory to forsake this topic without knowing how much Inquisitive Bob had suffered. I approached it again indirectly. "How hot was it on the hob where he was?" said I.

"It was for asking that very question he was put on," said my father.

"Was he tooked off?" I asked. I think my father's answer must

have been that he was, in the course of next day, as a corresponding image of Inquisitive Bob, suffering severely, remained to harrow my feelings. I cannot remember the words that created this image.

But I can remember passing upstairs holding my father's hand; and then finding myself in a crowd, among many legs and a few skirts, each containing an additional pair, presumably. I remember his last caution to me, "Now, don't you get lost in the crowd, Eustace John," and that he then talked to a leg-owner whose head I could not compass, because I really saw nothing of him but a ponderous corporation.

The leg-owner's voice was as ponderous, and the two together gave me an impression of something I had then no name for. I have learned it since—it is *solvency*. After some conversation his voice said to my father, with weighty pauses:—"Don't hesitate to make use of my name, Pascoe." That was my father's name, and my own; but I can't say I had ever before known any one to call him by it, without "Mr." I was naturally curious to know what the leg-owner's name was, having inferred that my father would now—occasionally at any rate—substitute it for his own. I never knew it, as the gentleman said, "Ta-ta, Pascoe!" and moved away. But first he interfered with my head—which I resented—and said, without looking at me so far as I saw:—"That your little chap? That's fine." But he may have got a peep at me round his stomach, when my eyes were not on him.

However, my father consoled me, looking down on me in my grove of legs, and saying:—"How are we getting on down there? All right?" I was able to give satisfactory assurances, like the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Then a gentleman without a hat who seemed to be at home, addressing my father with unwarrantable familiarity, called him Straps. But my father did not resent this; only saying in reply:—"You're the man I was looking for."

I quite anticipated that this gentleman would say I was the boy *he* was looking for, so firmly did he fix one eye upon me. The other seemed fixed on my father, as I thought at the time by choice, ascribing to his eyes the independent action of twin screws. But what he said was not what I expected at all, for he repeated exactly what the solvent gentleman had said:—"That your little chap?" But he did not sanction me in the same way, and I felt *de trop* when he added, "I thought all yours were little girls, Straps," rather reproachfully. I had the impression that my father cut a poor figure when he answered evasively:—"So they are, all except this one." Both appeared then to consider me, and I believe I anticipated some compromise that might soften the posi-

tion. But the gentleman only played the piano on his legs with his fingers; which were loose, because it was his thumbs only that were stuck in the trouser pockets. He stopped the tune to say suddenly:—"Noth'n' else at my shop. Boys, boys, boys! What's the office now, Straps?" By which I clearly understood he was inquiring about the purpose of my father's visit. "Anything I can do for you?" confirmed it.

"Not out here," said my father. "Haven't you got a quiet corner?"

"There's nobody to speak of in the clerk's den," said the gentleman. "Come along in." So we went along and found only a freckled youth of whom I think I felt that it was as well no one *should* speak, as praise might have been artificial. He had white hair close cropped, and was trying to get the feather of a pen below the collar of his shirt, as though to combat some irritation on his scapula. When we entered, he gave up trying, and wrote assiduously. The gentleman gave my father a chair and sat on a high stool himself, taking me between his knees. I was obliged to lend myself to the fiction that I liked this sort of thing. But I didn't. I was, however, too much occupied at this moment with a problem to be much concerned about this. I was asking myself the riddle:—"Why did this gentleman ask my father what the office was, when he must have known?"

"I'm prepared to be told I'm a fool, Stowe," said my father, beginning to untie the parcel he carried. "But even a couple of pounds is not to be sneezed at. I expect you can tell offhand whether these will fetch anything or not."

"Get 'em out, and let's have a look at 'em."

My father untied deliberately, with an evident motive. His *amour propre* wanted soft places to fall on, of disbelief in any substantial value of the articles to come—*pounds*, you know! The leg-owner would have done the same, but would have made it hundreds.

"There's any amount of string on the premises," said Mr. Stowe, of whose name I was still unaware, for a reason that will appear later.

"I like untying knots," said my father, not very plausibly. "You see after all, the things are no use to us. And I expect they'll pay the cab-fare. And it gave me the excuse for a ride with the kid. And what's a couple of shillings when all's said and done?"

"Well—let's have a look at 'em!" said Mr. Stowe.

My father finished the first knot, and began on the one at its

antipodes. This sort of knot is always harder to undo than the consummation knot, which clever young men can make a portage loop of—only the parcel rotates and amputates your finger. My father didn't appear to be in a hurry, but I thought Mr. Stowe did. However, he may have drummed on me from a mistaken benevolence: people do get so very wrong about what children like.

"Bother the string!" said he. "Throw it away. Hang the expense!"

My father was trying his teeth on the knot. Through them he said:—"All right! It's just coming." And it came, in time. Then during the removal of the paper he found an opportunity to say, anxiously:—"You quite understand that I do not myself attach any value to these articles. It is only that my profound ignorance hesitated to condemn them as valueless without reference to an authority like yourself——"

"Shut up!" said Mr. Stowe; and I thought he meant repack the two cylindrical boxes. But I saw my error when he held out his hand for one of them and began removing the cover. He got it off and looked inside. He said:—"Hullo!"

"It's not broken, is it?" said my father.

"Hand over t'other one," said Mr. Stowe. "I say, Straps!——"

"Well,—what? . . . They're exactly alike."

"Catch hold of this young shaver. He ain't safe when there's valuables about. . . . Pepper, go and tell Mr. Stacpoole to look in here before he goes." This was to the clerk who said "Mr. Stacpoole" inanimately, and went out into the big crowded room from which people were departing as for lunch, talking a great deal. I presumed that it was Mr. Stacpoole whose voice I had heard saying a great many sums of money somewhere in the heart of this grove of legs.

Do not suppose I lay claim to having grappled, under seven years old, with such a name as Stacpoole. But the fact that the great Fine Art Auction Mart of those days has held its name explains my belief that I heard it then. I believe my belief is a mistaken belief; but I should not talk such seeming nonsense did I not believe that every one's record of childish recollections is ready to meet me halfway. I heard *something* then no doubt, and subsequent experience told me what. But the clerk's name Pepper I *know* I heard; because I imputed to him a relation to our pepper-caster in the nursery, somehow connected with his freckles.

However, I can't understand much of what followed. Perhaps I was getting anxious for my midday meal, which my father had undertaken to be responsible for. But I do recollect that Mr.



Stacpoole came in, and Mr. Stowe intercepted him outside the office, speaking to him *sotto voce* over one of the vases, which he took with him. Presently Mr. Stacpoole said, "Glasgow?" and Mr. Stowe said, "No—Pascoe;" and both came in and he addressed my father by name, and added, "Pretty little thing!—but won't go into three figures I should say." My father looked highly satisfied, and then all three talked rather loud. After which Mr. Stacpoole actually said what the other two had said:—"That *your* little chap, Mr. Pascoe? Wants his dinner, I should say." I thought Mr. Stacpoole a very sensible man.

I can't account for my remembering nothing clearly of the banquet, unless it is owing to my having devoted myself entirely to the pleasures of the table. I am haunted by an impression that the name of the restaurant was Tippetty's, but twenty years later my father repudiated Tippetty; only he couldn't recollect the real name. We went at the recommendation of Mr. Stowe, who accompanied us. He and my father talked a great deal, but much of their talk turned on what appeared to me to be sums, things I had a very strong objection to.

My memory is abnormally clear about my interview with my father in another cab, driving home. Probably items of it were repeated afterwards anecdotically, in my hearing.

I said to him:—"When you sneezes at some money, how much money is it?" He had some difficulty in tracing out the original of this in our conversation, but he found it out in the end, and gave a clear reply:—"Anything under fifteen shillings." I was grateful to him for his conciseness.

The next interrogation I inflicted on him was more difficult. "Why was you a fool's toe? Why wasn't you a fool's fum?" It required close analysis to run this home. But it was found at last in the only mention my father had made of the cross-eyed gentleman's name. Had he uttered it a second time, I firmly believe I should have solved the problem unassisted. He laughed all the way home, after finding it out, repeating to himself again and again:—"Prepared to be told I'm a fool's toe!" He laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

When we got home I said to him, "Shall we go to Scampling's tomorrow?" in perfectly good faith. And he again replied insincerely:—"Tomorrow or next day or the day after that."



## CHAPTER IV

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

I WASN'T going to let my father off about Campling's, taxing him each day with his perfidy. He assigned reasons for it of the baldest insufficiency. When, next day, I asked him, "Why wasn't me and you went to Scampling's today?" he replied without shame, as far as I saw, "Because *me* is the accusative case of the pronoun I"; and, when I repeated my question in another form twenty-four hours later, he took a mean advantage of the circumstances under which I found myself, saying:—"Because Scampling's don't care about little boys that take too much cake at one mouthful." I was obliged to accept these as sound reasons, because I could not meet the gravamen of their contained accusations. But when on the third day I was put off with, "Because you're kicking holes in your father's trousers"; my suspicions of ill-faith became irrepressible and I said, "That is not a question to my answer," a perversion of a reproach often addressed to myself.

Varnish interposed upon this, with an absurd pretext that it was possible to carry on communication with me without the knowledge of others present in the flesh. My father was supposed to be unaware of a short homily she addressed to me, to the effect that no young gentleman of the better class ever indulged in such a disrespect as contradict his father. She was surprised and shocked, nothing in my extraction or bringing up having warranted an anticipation of such conduct. It was time and plenty I learned to behave, in order to deserve certain privileges now accorded to me. For instance, no renegade against the traditions of his family could be received in Society, which couldn't abide such goings on, notoriously. Most young gentlemen's mars, on hearing of such transgressions, would at once say they wasn't to be allowed to play with Adaropposite in the Square that afternoon. This was the young lady properly named Ada Fraser, and her familiar name given above was intended to convey her provenance as well. For her father and mother lived on the other side of the Square, and her mother played on the piano.

Campling's evaporated, unfulfilled. I was chagrined, because I had made some parade of my approaching visit there, in conversa-

tion with this same Ada Fraser, in the Square—conversation which Varnish denounced as rude. Vainglorious would have been a better chosen expression. It consisted of boastful statements on either part, every such statement laying a more emphatic claim than the one it outfaced to greater social influence, more extensive premises, larger households, wider information, superior furniture, longer hours of study, more learned instructors, more courtly manners, a completer solvency—all man can covet, in short—on the part of the Pascoes and the Frasers respectively. On these terms, I think Ada and I enjoyed each other's society.

Possibly this relation had its origin in a denial of mine, early in our acquaintance, that Ada's name could possibly be Fraser. I had very strong grounds for doubting it, but they are difficult to explain. I will however see what I can do.

When very young indeed I had heard the name Fraser applied in a way no English dictionary, I am sure, warrants. "Striggits and slammons, yes!"—these words were Varnish's—"Frasers quite another thing, and on no account, especially when a clean cloth." Cast over in your mind all your memories of tea and bread-and-milk in the nursery, and see if you can't identify these mysteries. . . . You give it up?—well then, I shall have to tell? *Striggits* and *slammons* were incidents in my refreshments, foreign to the nature of the *lixivium* they occurred in. The former were twiggy, the latter leafy. But *frasers*, strange to say, were those by-products of The Milk, that float in its surface; and being skimmed off with a spoon, are deposited by Law and Order in the slop-basin, or at least in the tray; but by Anarchists on the cloth, and a dreadful mess made, you never!—that is, if you were Varnish.

Even now, when I accommodate the flotsam and jetsam of an unsuccessfully compounded cup of tea, it is borne in upon me that tea-timbers, afloat, are *striggits*; tea-leaves, on the loose, *slammons*; and, above all, that the accidents of milk are *frasers*. How can they be anything else? Don't I *know*?

Anyhow, I was so clear about it at seven years old that when the little girl in the Square told me her name was Ada Fraser. I scornfully denied the possibility of such a name for any human creature. A name apiece for all things, and property in any name established by priority of use—that was only fair play, according to me. My understanding—like other children's—was in revolt against the calling of any two things by the same name. So a precedent of mutual contradiction was established between me and the little girl in the Square, and a warm friendship was founded on it, although the severe model of conversation it originated was

never relaxed from. And it was, according to Varnish, rude; and had she been me, she would have been ashamed to it.

The need for this fact in my narrative now is to explain an intimation I remember giving to Ada Fraser one morning in the Square, some weeks probably after my hansom-cab experience, to the effect that her father hadn't got six hundred pounds apiece. Why the event that led to this statement is dim in my memory, and my interview with Ada vivid, I cannot tell. I have to accept the images of myself, Ada, and the large stone roller in the Square, as forcible realities; while a visit of Mr. Stowe, connected with the two pink pots, to my father the evening before, has become in sixty-four years two eyes pulling opposite ways, and a great deal of laughter and congratulations. All the rest is oblivion.

But I know from my clearly remembered speech to Ada, and her prompt rejoinder that her father had sixty hundred—and what was more our cook hadn't a tortoise-shell cat—that this must have been just after he heard of the amazing sale of the two pink pots at auction, which was, as I have always believed, the beginning of our family misfortunes.

As I have since understood, a set of Rose-du-Barry vases of this shape had been known to exist, with a muse painted on each. Five of these were in the collection of a Duke, two of a Marquis. Euterpe and Calliope were missing, till they turned up—the very self-same vases!—in the box Mr. Freeman unpacked so carefully that Sunday morning in Mecklenburg Square.

There was a scene of wild enthusiasm at Stacpoole's when they were brought to the hammer. My father I believe could not attend the sale, owing to the tyranny of Somerset House; but Mr. Stowe called in on his way home to congratulate him on the result. The Duke and the Marquis had gone into competition, and the Marquis had outbidden the Duke, "becoming the possessor" of Euterpe and Calliope for the modest sum of twelve hundred pounds!

It is possible that my own interest in these developments would have been greater, and that I should have kept a livelier memory of their details, had I not been preoccupied by a desire to report to Ada a confutation of a point she had laid great stress on. I was absorbed in my anxiety to triumph over her with a statement that my father had denied the tortoise-shell cat she had claimed for her cook. He had done so, in a sense, but his incredulity had been founded on a misconception, due to my pronunciation. When I reported Ada's words, to the best of my ability, his comment was:—"A torture-cell cat!—what a hideous creature!

Like the Inquisition, exactly." But the misconception was my own, not my father's; for I had imagined his denial which followed, that such an animal existed, to mean that Ada's cook possessed no cat at all. My repetition of this to Ada made her indignant, and strained our relations for a time.

I read a short while since in the *Sunday Times*—which is fingered here, by waste old men like me, as long as the copy is legible, and sometimes lasts on till its next Sunday—that "The Heliconides," originally painted for Madame de Courtraie, had been pooled by their respective noble owners, to increase their value, and sold by them "for a fabulous sum"—what very dull fables are told in Auction Rooms!—to an American gentleman, who was ready to give them up for double the money, if English enthusiasm would subscribe to "keep them in the country."

However, all that is neither here nor there. I know these rather pretty little pots were called "The Heliconides" which is, in plain English, the Muses. And my father got six hundred pounds apiece for his two, less percentages. And no good came of it.

Indeed, these pots were ill-starred from the beginning. I could not even brandish their price in the face of Ada Fraser without a mishap to follow. I may say that she and I were torn asunder, if not in consequence of, at least in connection with, the sale of the Heliconides. No doubt this was partly due to our way of dealing with the question of their price. The handle of the big stone roller had been so adjusted by its manufacturer that it would not lie on the ground normally, and when held down sprang up, and fluctuated to equilibrium. We availed ourselves of this property as a rhythmical accompaniment to a monotonous recitation, in unison, of the price of Euterpe and Calliope. I cannot pretend any surprise now at the result that came about. Ada Fraser got a bad blow in the face from the recoil of the handle, and we both howled loud enough to be heard at 'Ammersmith, if Varnish's estimate was trustworthy. It was never corroborated; but for all that Ada's nurse, backed by authorities at home, decided against my being allowed to play with her, I was that rough and rude. So I lost sight of Ada. Now this was very unjust, because the affair of the roller-handle was at least a joint-stock iniquity.

I suppose it was this tragedy, and my seeing Ada at a compulsory distance next day, with diachylum on her nose, that made me remember this part of my sixth summer in London more plainly than the actual sequel of my excursion into auction-land. That presents itself to me in disjointed fragments. One of these is a



period of mere crude jubilation following naturally on the announcement of the sale, in the middle of which my father's voice appears to say repeatedly, "Shan't believe it till I see the cheque!" and my mother's, "I suppose now I shall be allowed a brougham and not have to tramp." Both these speeches remain clearly enough, with the meanings I ascribed to them; connecting the former with the pattern on my father's trousers, the latter with carpet-sweeping, owing to my mother's pronunciation of the word "brougham." Another later fragment is the great offence my father gave to my mother by saying, "That's just like you, Cæcilia!" after reading aloud something in *Punch*, which my mother seemed to think the reverse of humorous. She captured the *London Charivari*, and burnt it, and though I had no doubt my father immediately bought another copy, he hid it away discreetly. Anyhow, when his effects came to be sold—after the cause of them was laid in his grave—a complete set of *Punch*, from the earliest dawn till the "now" of that date, which has since changed somehow to forty years ago, was entered in the auctioneer's catalogue, and sold as perfect. So it must have contained the deathless first lecture of Mrs. Caudle, which I identified later as the one that gave my mother such offence.

From it, reasoning backwards, I can infer that my mother had no sooner built one castle in the air with the hundreds paid for the Heliconides, than she used them to lay the foundations of another. They played the part of Mr. Caudle's five pounds, which could have bought black satin gowns and bonnets for the girls and no end of things, if Mr. Caudle hadn't lent it to a friend. But Mrs. Caudle was a strong character, acting on the courage of her own convictions. My mother was a weak one, and no doubt needed the support she received from Uncle Francis and Uncle Sam, in concert with whom her attacks on my father became as formidable as her prototype's on her defenceless mate in the small hours of the morning.

These uncles of mine had shown some restlessness on the question of the ownership of the treasure trove. But I suppose the fact that the house in Mecklenburg Square had been settled on my mother at her marriage—without reservation as to its contents, which were I suppose presumed to be of no value—appeared conclusive at this time, and this restlessness never came to maturity. Only, they were not going to let the windfall alone. They would have a finger in the pie.

I suppose my own powers of observation were growing rapidly at this point, so clearly do I begin to recollect some of the con-



versation of my seniors. But, quite possibly, what seems to my memory now to belong to a single occasion, may be several substantially identical conversations rolled into one. It does not matter. I write it as I recollect it.

On one occasion I recall distinctly this speech of my Uncle Sam's:—"Your husband, Cæcilia, will be a wise man, and consult his own interests, if he does as I tell him. Just let him look at this little windfall as a nest egg, and 'aundle it as Capital." I remember the words of this, and could almost reconstruct the substance of the homily which followed, one of the sort I have already indicated, a review of the great successes that would have attended—might even still attend—my father's course in life if, instead of letting himself be guided by mysterious precepts of some moral code which, for any definition of it that came into the conversation, might have been anything from the Vedas to Virgil's Eclogues, he had allowed himself to be tutored by practical men of the world; who knew something of life, and had escaped the baneful influences of Ideas and Sermons. I am not responsible for the vagueness of my uncle's methods of discussion, but I vouch for the accuracy of my report.

"Your husband, Cæcilia," said my Uncle Francis, when his turn came, speaking as though he had just settled off a number of other ladies' husbands, "*your* husband, with his great talents and faculties and things, might have had his seat in the House of Commons, years ago, and be looking forward to an Under-Secretaryship now. *If* he'd listened to me! Don't take my word for it! *I* ain't anybody. But just—you—go—to any Club in London, and see if they won't tell you the same!" I fixed my eyes on my mother, expecting to see her start at once. And I felt very curious about the result, because I only knew of Clubs in connection with their King and Knave and so on, in Beggar-my-neighbour. But my mother sat still—something, as I think now, as a balloon remains quiet to be inflated. My Uncle Francis added a postscript, to endorse his rather boastful modesty, repeating more than once:—"Don't let what I say go for anything." He then inducted a bystander into the conversation, saying:—"Here's little Kidneys. Ask little Kidneys. *He's* a practical man. *He'll* tell you! Don't mind *me*."

Mr. Tom Skidney, to whom my uncle referred, was, like my mother and my sisters and myself, a Sunday afternoon visitor at my grandmother's suburban villa at Highbury. It was suburban in those days, and fowls clucked there in the coach-house yard, about new-laid eggs, with perfect sincerity. And small boys and

girls might walk carefully up the avenues of the strawberry-beds, and gather the big ones into a basket lined with grape-leaves out of the hothouse; only not to eat more than three themselves, till after dinner. One has a happy faculty of recollecting the summer days of one's childhood, and my memories of Highbury are, briefly—that it was summer there!

I don't think Mr. Tom Skidney appreciated his opportunities in the country; at least, not as one would have supposed a town-sparrow from the Inner Temple might have done. For he sat indoors and drank whiskey-and-water with my uncles, as long as they remained with him, and by himself when they forsook him. When appealed to by my Uncle Francis, as above, he was already consuming whiskey-and-water, though it was quite early in the day, and of course smoking. He did not seem prepared to risk his reputation for sagacity by giving a definite opinion. He blinked and tittered slightly, and then said:—"Ah!" It was not much; but my Uncle Francis appeared to accept it as a reinforcement of his view, saying:—"You see what little Kidneys thinks. Now *there's* a man, Cæcilia, whose opinions are worth having!" He stopped in a sort of perpetual sentry-go up and down the room, with an opened hand extended towards Mr. Skidney, as though to lay the expanse of a great mind open to a world in search of good counsel. "He's no mere theorist," he added. "What he says he means." My Uncle Sam remarked collaterally that there was no psalm-singin' about little Tommy. Any one could see that without gettin' off his chair. And my Uncle Francis assented to this with a screwed up face of astuteness, and so many nods that an extremely long pinch of snuff he took was made intermittent, and I noticed its resemblance, both in time and tune, to the prolonged cluck of a hen in the stableyard, heard through the open window.

I was too young to be discouraged by what I now perceive to be a fatal lack of consecutiveness in my uncles. I swallowed their remarks whole and was deeply impressed. But I could see that Mr. Skidney did not rise to the occasion, and did nothing to confirm the testimonials they had given. He picked up and let fall a leg he had crossed on its fellow, by the pattern of a large plaid trouser: his finger and thumb choosing the same incident in the pattern to hold by, but always at different points in it; and he contrived, by pulling one whisker, to twist his cigar aside and partly close the eye above it. It did not improve his appearance. I do not dwell on these details to show how closely children notice small things in their seniors—that you know already—but to

convey how attentively I was watching Mr. Skidney for some discharge of judicial brilliance, some intellectual firework that never came.

But what did that matter after all, if my mother saw no need for it? I watched for the firework no longer when my mother said, "I tell you what I should like. I should like Nathaniel *himself* to hear that opinion of Mr. Skidney's," with such a tone of deep conviction of its existence, that I could not but infer that it must have been somehow expressed, though unperceived by me on account of my youth. Mr. Skidney may be said to have begun to try to shake his head in a deprecatory manner, but to have failed in doing so from want of force of character. During his effort my uncle drew a breath of solid snuff, presumably, into his lungs; a *sostenuto* note this time, and fixed Mr. Skidney with an eye half-closed by the opening of his nostrils to admit the snuff.

But Mr. Skidney was not capable of anything but an embarrassed taciturnity, tempered by a weak smile. My Uncle Francis accounted for this by saying that Kidneys was a deep card, and it was very difficult to get any change out of *him*. My Uncle Sam observed that he was a "fly customer." I associated this vaguely with the fly we had come in that Sunday (as was our practice), that was to call for us again at five punctually to take us back to Bloomsbury.

I remember feeling deeply thankful that no arrangement seemed to follow for Mr. Skidney to accompany us back to Mecklenburg Square. I had feared my mother might have wanted him at home straightway, to impress my father with that opinion, which I had no doubt had been clear to her, although I had somehow missed it.

I hope, as before, that four-fifths of the foregoing is not concoction of the intrinsically probable, supplied after the fact by Memory, in revolt against defeat. If it is, it is only false in the piecing together; every constituent item is true in itself. I have no objection to its being thought fiction—why should I have any? Let it be considered to be what I groundedly suppose to have happened; only make the grounds strong enough.

This recrudescence of doubt, cast by myself on my own trustworthiness—or as I see folk say in these days "reliability"—is perhaps due to my reason entering a protest against a scene that follows on the stage of reminiscence. In it my two uncles appear as promoters of an interview between my father, as Inexperience with Property to invest, and Mr. Skidney as Worldly Sagacity

ready to give disinterested advice. I had not then the penetration to detect in their performance the characteristics of Wags. Neither had my mother, who took every word they uttered *au pied de la lettre*. It is no use trying to pretend she was not a matter-of-fact woman.

It was this literalness of character that clothed my uncle's worldly philosophy with an importance that it could never have acquired or maintained for itself. Reports of their random-shot lucubrations, as witnessed by the eyes of Faith, carried a weight with my father which he never would have attached to any of their utterances had he himself been present to hear them. Even Mr. Skidney, as delineated by my mother, assumed a judicial importance, becoming under her skilful hands a high Authority on business-matters, a past master of Stock and Scrip, a man with an overpowering waistcoat, unimpeachable linen, a stove-pipe hat above suspicion, a mahogany office, and clerks. "Mr. Waters Skidney," said she to my father in the next conversation I heard between them, "may be reticent—that I do not deny. But his responsibility is beyond question. I have never—" here my mother reflected conscientiously for a few seconds—"no, I think I may say I have *never*, seen a countenance on which the word 'Experience' was more convincingly written." My mother's manner stipulated so forcibly for the inverted commas as almost to amount to upper-case type. She ended up an appreciation of Mr. Skidney's character with:—"And I have never in my life met with any one more absolutely unpretentious."

I rather think that a growing tendency of my father to be influenced by this description of Mr. Skidney's greatness was nipped in the bud by its peroration. "I daresay he's all very fine," said he. "But what I want to get at is—what the dickens do your brothers and their Mr. Pigney want me to do—do—do!"

My mother appeared to me to strengthen the position she had partially endangered, by her reply:—"Not to be impatient, for *one* thing, Nathaniel! And his name is *not* Pigney, but Skidney." I felt that she was all right again now and that I was a sinner for not seeing that my father ought to be ashamed of himself.

"I can tell you and your brothers and your Mr. Squibney one thing," said he, incorrigibly, "I'm not going to throw any of that thousand pounds away on shares in Mount Bulimy, that's flat!"

"Who has mentioned Mount Bulimy?" said my mother, freezing. "Has any one heard me utter the words, Mount Bulimy? Is there any reason to suppose that my brothers know anything whatever about Mount Bulimy? Or that Mr. Walter Skidney ever



so much as referred to Mount Bulimy?" My mother's line of controversy was essentially rhetorical, and her scornful repetition of terms served two purposes; it overawed and silenced her opponent, and gave her confidence in her own case. The complete disconnection from every point at issue of the term repeated was no drawback on the effectiveness of this method. I felt that my father was refuted—hadn't a leg to stand upon. I was sorry for him, as of course I was on his side in everything. However, I mustered courage, and some amount of confidence in his case, from the calmness with which he replied:—"Not so far, Cæcilia; they will in time. You'll see." My mother didn't say she wouldn't see, but contrived to make silence say it for her. My father added:—"I know it's Mount Bulimy." Only he did not speak above his breath.

I suppose Mount Bulimy is forgotten now, after all this length of time. I learned all about it later, as soon as I was old enough to know things. It was a hill in Australia somewhere, in the soil of which a squatter had detected gold. I had been told by Varnish not to squat on the hearth-rug, but to hold upright like a young gentleman. So I had a vivid image in my mind of a squatter squatting upon this hill, and detecting the gold, in profile against the sky. Now at the time of writing, this hill had been raging on the Stock Exchange. And the verb is rightly applied; for really if Mount Bulimy had broken out as a volcano, it could not have raged more fiercely. The Shares in the Company that had bought it from the Squatter went up and down like the Barometer when it gets the bit in its teeth. Fortunes were made and lost over Mount Bulimy before an authenticated nugget came to confirm the reports of its auriferous deposits. I like to repeat this expression now, remembering as I do how my father made me say it then, for practice in elocution, and I said it wrong. "Odoriferous!" said he. "That's a long word for a kid to know at seven. Say it again, Eustace John." I tried it again and I think I must have said Adariferous, because my mother said:—"He's thinking of that child in the Square."

I lost the thread of that conversation because it was nine—too late for little boys to be up—and my second and third sisters came to conduct me away to bed. My eldest sister I know considered that she was entitled to stop up till eleven; as I thought because she was eleven. This fixes the date of this conversation for me as the last half of my seventh year at latest, as my eldest sister was just five years my senior. A child remains eleven in the eyes of its brothers and sisters until its twelfth birthday. Had I been



over seven I could not have had this idea. My father had favoured or originated it, in a conversation which ended in a pledge to myself that when I was twenty, I should stop up till twenty. I should not care to stop up till seventy now. Sleep is happiness; what else is?

Anyhow, I went to bed then, and heard no more of Mount Bulimy till later. I heard a good deal in the end, for my uncles did mention in time what they had not mentioned so far. And it *was* Mount Bulimy.

I firmly believe that my father's attitude in the conversation given above was due to an expiring effort of his good Angel to head him off from the dangers of the Stock Exchange. His aversion to tampering with gilt-edged securities was surely an instinctive perception of a red lamp ahead in the darkness that shrouded the perspective of his line of Life. Why could he not take warning? His conduct seems to me now—to pursue the simile—like that of those insensate railway engines that I have so often seen, and been obliged to accept unexplained; engines that have rushed headlong on to what ought to have been destruction, if there had been any good faith at all in signals—motionless discs of scarlet vermilion on a background of unmeasurable night. Engines that have seemed to compound with their consciences by the remorseless emission of a deafening yell, having no apparent purpose but to insult the understanding of outsiders not connected with the Company. Oh, that my father had heeded his red lamps ahead, and modelled his conduct on that of those more tractable trains that slow down even in tunnels, and stand still, suffering from their intestines audibly, until something supernatural clicks and the red lamps turn green and then they yell in moderation from joy, and go on chastened!

Not that my father's disregard of his guardian Angel's warning—if it was one—was followed by the Nemesis financiers would have regarded as grievous! On the contrary, he was accounted by his friends a favourite of Fortune, and altogether enviable. So far from losing the twelve hundred pounds that at my mother's instigation he invested in Mount Bulimy, he doubled, trebled, quadrupled it, within a twelvemonth. What his shares are worth now, in the hands of their present possessors, I do not know. But for all that, the box that Mr. Freeman unpacked was Pandora's box, to me and mine, and Mount Bulimy was as regrettable a mountain as the Venusberg.

## CHAPTER V

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

I SHALL write what I write my own way—else where would be the gain, to me, of having no readers, and expecting none? Having said this, if hereafter any stray eye lights upon this page, its owner will know that the way I have just told the substance of my story, all in a rush, was chosen of set purpose, with a full knowledge of its grievously inartistic character. What does it matter? What does anything matter? There are the facts. But for my own share in them—the share that further information, later on, filled out—that is another aspect of the case. And I choose to jot down piecemeal, for my own pastime and sad recreation—less sad now perhaps than the tale may become as it grows—just as much or as little of it as I recollect, not pledging myself to an exact chronology. For I cannot place the events in their order; can only guess at it, as they come in independent flashes.

A very short flash—perhaps soon after that visit to Highbury—shows me a group consisting of my father, Mr. Stowe from the Auction Rooms; a gentleman whom I recognize as possessing the corporation which kept me concealed from its owner there, and lastly myself. I now picture myself as part of the group, which includes a small boy not yet seven, playing chess under the table without the board. Not like Morphy, be it understood, I had the *men*, and arranged them on the carpet, at pleasure. They frequently tumbled down, keeping me busy.

If they had been Staunton men, wide enough to bridge the corrugations of the carpet, I might have taken more note of the conversation. As it is, all the recollection I can swear to is that in which the stout gentleman says, "Observe, I take no responsibility! Do as you like, but don't quote me," several times. Mr. Stowe says, presently:—"He wants 'em himself. I see it in his eye. Don't you let him have 'em, Strap!" I may then have glanced out from under the table, for I become conscious that my father is meshed in uncertainties, and feeling about on his face for something to reassure. At last he sees a light. "After all, the vases *were* my wife's. And they were *not* in the Settlement, whatever my brother-in-law Francis may say." I don't believe I heard any more of the conversation, but some inner monitor convinces

me that Mr. Boethius then said, weightily:—"On the Legal Aspects of the case, my dear Sir, I venture no opinion. Nice questions may arise, at any moment." He then, I feel sure, looked at his watch and became colloquial:—"All I say is—if you don't close with the offer, give me the refusal of it."

I can recollect the two visitors taking leave together, and Mr. Stowe coming back to lay one finger astutely on his nose, and say:—"He wants 'em himself, my boy! Don't you let him have 'em." Then he departed, and my father said "Hm!" quite articulately as it is spelled; Varnish came to summon me to my tea, but took note of preoccupation of my father's mind. "Your par, he's got his considerin' cap on, I lay," was the way she put it.

There vanishes that flash. Even so an inch of Magnesium wire burns out, and leaves the darkness solid.

The following flash must have come rather soon, for me to connect it with its predecessor. Else I should have forgotten the first, seeing that I attached no meaning whatever to the conversation I had heard. Meaning had to be supplied later; and it came to me, as I suppose, on the occasion of my next visit to my grandmother's. During a somewhat longer inch of the Magnesium light of Memory, I can hear conversation, as follows, between my mother and my uncle Francis.

"Speaking as your Trustee *and* your professional Adviser, Cæcilia, I can only say that it seems to me, sailing very near the wind." My uncle took a long pinch of snuff and repeated briefly at the end of it:—"Very near indeed!" It might have been the long pinch's last will and testament, and the two sneezes that followed letters of administration. This metaphorical adaptation is of course recent.

Said my mother:—"I cannot question your opinion, Francis. To do so would be in the highest degree presumptuous. But I think you are entirely wrong. And I am convinced that further reflection will show that this is the case. If you are right in saying that the Heliconides were in the Settlement, why, I ask you, did you not unpack that box as Trustee, and realize their value, with a view to its investment in a fund sanctioned by the Lord Chancellor? I am merely repeating Nathaniel's words. I have no claim to an opinion of my own, and pronounce none. But that you are entirely mistaken I have not a shadow of doubt." After which or something uncommonly like it, my mother embarked on a dignified silence, visibly.

"That's Nathaniel's theory," said my uncle. "That's your husband all over, Cæcilia." My belief now is that my uncle,

not feeling secure in his position, was glad to interrupt the thread of the argument, and turn it to a sort of chronic analysis of my father's character which he and my mother were fond of ringing changes on and wrangling over. "You'll never persuade any man of any standing at the Bar to subscribe to that theory. It's no use, Cæcilia—don't tell me! Your husband's a man I look at all round, Cæcilia. A man of extraordinary capacity—of remarkable capacity—for erudition and all that sort of thing . . . but!—however, you know what I'm going to say, Cæcilia,"—here my mother inserted a sigh and a nod—"but *paradoxical!*" After which my uncle took more snuff than seemed reasonable or necessary, putting his nose from side to side to receive it, but keeping his eyes on my mother as he slouched up and down the room. Then he ended with a short interrogative syllable, most nearly describable as the "hein!" of a French author, with the last two letters deleted.

"Nathaniel is paradoxical, as a rule," said my mother, "but in this case he has acted judiciously. And you cannot deny that it was your own advice, Francis. Never mind the boy now!"

But my uncle was glad to be interrupted by the boy, as he was not in a position to meet the indictment. He conceded a volume on Zoology to me, in response to my application for it, and set me going with a picture of a Wanderoo, by request. Then he turned to my mother, and said:—"Let's see—where were we?—Oh—well—it doesn't matter! Nathaniel's bought the shares, and paid for 'em——" He continued talking, but I suppose the Wanderoo had fascinated me, or the Magnesium wire is exhausted, for I can remember nothing more of a tangible nature. A dim image of the room remains, with its superabundance of cabinets which I believe contained the Rear-Admiral's geological specimens, his portrait over the chimney-piece, with Dresden China—Galatea reposing on a clock—and miniatures in ovals; Berlin woolwork cushions and a sense of frills and tassels, and last and chiefest, my grandmother herself, in gold spectacles, seated in a high-backed chair to which she bore nearly the relations a centaur has to his horse, or rather, those his thoughtful half has to his business half. I, at least, conceived of her as a fixture, the more so that the chair had wheels, and yet her dinner was brought to her on a tray. A centaur's advantages are obvious—he never can be under any such necessity.

I suppose that on this occasion my mother and Uncle Francis had been conversing seriously, taking advantage of the absence of company. For my Uncle Sam had gone to Wexford on business, and no casual of the Mr. Skidney class was to the fore. My elder

sister Ellen was showing her governess over the estate, this lady having come with us this time instead of Varnish, making four in the fly. Her name, Helen Evans, was a constant perplexity to me, owing to Varnish's habits in religious imprecation—of a mild sort, you understand. "Merciful 'Evans, Master Eustace, wherever can you expect?" associated itself, with this young lady quite as much as it did with the final home of subservient and mean-spirited little boys, who always meet the convenience of their guardians.

A reaction from this association tended to prejudice me against her; as I now see, most unfairly; although she certainly fostered my hostility by a disciplinarian attitude towards persons of my age and sex. In a chronic feud, which I assumed to exist as a matter of course in my family—and to spread itself throughout society, for that matter—Miss Evans ranked among my opponents. My father, Varnish, and my sister Grace, the youngest, were "on my side." The rest of my flesh and blood, and Miss Evans, represented an opposing army, of which I accepted my mother as commander-in-chief. The *casus belli* was left undefined, as also the nature of operations and the class of armament. Preparation stopped short at scheduling the combatants. Everybody was on my side, or that other side, less clearly definable. But feeling did not run so high between me and any other member of this opposing league, as Miss Evans. My recollection is, that we showed an unchristian spirit. I did, certainly; for—if I am not mistaken—I bit Miss Evans. Not of course, as aliment, but as an act of tyrannical self-assertion, coupled with a desire to draw blood.

I have only referred to this young lady at this point to account for her sudden appearance as an aftermath of my checked recollection of this interview. For as my memory recalls the door into the garden, her image comes in and says:—"Oh, I beg pardon! I didn't know. Shall I go?" To which my mother replies in a dignified tone:—"Shall you go? Miss Evans? Why should you go? On no account dream of doing any such thing." And Miss Evans says:—"Oh, I didn't know. How was I to tell?" Then my grandmother speaks from her chair thus:—"Yes—you come in, Miss Helen Evans, if that's your name, and stop 'em quarrelling." Which convinces me that the blank in my memory conceals some spirited passages between my mother and her brother, and that I had found the Wanderoo very engrossing.

My grandmother had a very prepotent manner, and used to say what she liked. Every one was rather afraid of her. Indeed I had heard Miss Evans refer to her as an old spitfire. At the time



I attached little weight to her doing so, as I understood the expression to be connected with the fireplace, used as a spittoon; a subject that had been under discussion between myself and Varnish, not so long previously. Looking back now, with the experience of a lifetime of the epithetics my fellow-creatures apply to one another to relieve their own feelings, I am inclined to class this one as strained and exaggerated. My grandmother, according to Varnish, had a hoverbearin' way with her of standing no nonsense, and whatever could you expect at eighty-seven, and property in the funds? Varnish had no patience with people finding fault, and giving themselves airs. Miss Evans was the people, this time; and though Varnish was not herself inclined to be charitable to my grandmother, her objections to Miss Evans were still stronger. Even in those early days, Varnish took exception to the owner even of the finest head of hair you ever, being so keenly alive as was Miss Evans to which side her bread was buttered. She had not lived to her time of life, Varnish said once, apropos of Miss Evans, to be unable to tell a cat when she saw one. I thought Varnish unfair, technically. But Miss Evans was no favourite of mine, for all that.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

WHETHER I did or did not gather at the time a clear conception of the events that followed the discovery and sale of the Heliconides I cannot say now, nor does it signify. If I did not do so then, the knowledge came to me not very much later. And it amounted to this:—that my father, coming into possession of a sum of money shot out of the blue, that he conceived he had a sort of right to play ducks and drakes with, did so by purchasing for £1,200 what had a few days before stood in the market at 10,000, acquiring thereby a considerable fraction of a gold mountain in Australia, trumpeted as Ophir and Golconda in one, until one day came a counter blast that shattered, or seemed to shatter, its pretensions to be either. Mount Bulimy had burst, as a bubble—a worse than South Sea bubble—and hundreds of investors were ruined. Its scrip was so much wastepaper, and remained so until a suspicion grew that it was being bought up by one or two obscure firms of brokers on behalf of the very speculators who had been denouncing it as the most palpably fraudulent of Golcondas.

I suspect that one of the most active manipulators of the stock and share market in this matter was the massively solvent gentleman whose corporation I had seen—not himself—at the Auction Room. I had heard his name since then; it was Mr. Seth Boethius, of the banking firm of McCornodate, Boethius and Tripp. I have sometimes thought leniently of this gentleman, for he could easily have scared my father off his prize, and bought it himself. To be sure it was only a small matter. He was a five-figure man, at least. Besides, is it certain he did not think he was taking the best means of arriving at his end without showing the cards he held? One gets cynical over these things.

Anyhow, at the very time that this purchase of my father's was hanging in the balance, a consignment of nuggets was on its way to Sydney that was to send the demand for Mount Bulimies again up to frenzy-point, and despair to the hearts of former holders who had let them go in panic for what they would fetch. Dogged by bushrangers, who never dared to risk the trial of their luck against such a safety-guard as rode front and rear of their precious charge; sleepless—in the persons of their responsible custodians—

lest this safety-guard should round upon them, turn traitors, and retire upon the proceeds of their enterprise, these nuggets travelled over what was then a desert to Port Jackson to start on an eight weeks' voyage to England, and convince the Stock Exchange of Golconda. It is strange to us, in these days when Antipodean news comes in an hour, to think that old songs were being grudged for shares in Mount Bulimy weeks and weeks after these testimonials to its character had started.

However, they came—these lumps of irrefutable gold; far too heavy to sow claims with, however many dupes were ready to buy them. They came, and some mysterious telegraphy, not only wireless but dynamoless, touched the sensitive nerves of Capel Court a day before the ship that brought them sighted land, and caused my father to say to my mother over the *Times* at breakfast:—"Hullo, Cæcilia, we've gone up three-fifths!"

"I will thank you, Nathaniel," said my mother, "to be intelligible. If you are referring to your Australians—as of course you are—why not say so! Is it so, or not?"

"That's about it!" said my father. And then he kissed me and my youngest sister and went away to Somerset House in a buoyant frame of mind. And my mother relaxed and showed satisfaction, not sending me back to the nursery, my proper sphere.

Deep snow was white on Mecklenburg Square when this happened. Next day it was thicker, and Mr. Freeman, The Man, was at his wits' end to do down the doorsteps and the front pavement, and the airey out, and clear the gutters. Also it was found difficult to keep at bay applicants who sought to substitute their services for his. Then the snowflakes became bloated; and, though they tempted the instructor of childhood to discourse on their crystalline structure, didn't hold up not to say long enough to make any figure. The bloated snowflakes and a change in the wind, between them, brought about a steady deluge of lukewarm water from above; and below, a condition of things you couldn't get a hansom. Some of my phraseology I borrow from Varnish, not all.

However, this unattainability of hansoms was not universal, for my father got one to come home from the Office, which ploughed its way to the door with difficulty. I remember his speech to the driver, as he handed him a large silver coin, "You won't complain of that, my man," and the driver's response, "Wot'd I gain by complainin', Guvnor?"—not as an expression of ingratitude, but of insight into double entry. He *would* have complained, however large his fare had been, if he had seen his way to increasing it. But a five-shilling piece was prohibitive. My father laughed genially.

Indeed, he seemed to be in the highest spirits, in spite of the weather. He went upstairs two steps at a time, after eliciting from Watkins, the parlour maid, who had opened the door, her thought that missis was gone to get ready for dinner. He had sanctioned me, by passing crumple, in the passage, and I considered myself warranted in following, accounting for my conduct to Watkins by saying:—"I'm going up to par." I am telling the truth, though you may not believe it, when I say that it was this speech of mine that made my recollection of what I heard through the open door of my mother's room hold good until I was old enough to know what it meant. Here it is:

"Hullo—I say, Cæcilia, where are you? What do you think? . . . What—what's that? Anything wrong?" . . .

"Only the start!—the start you gave me. . . . Oh no—I shall be *quite* right if you will only have patience for *one* moment." Presumably my father had it; for after my idea of a moment my mother said:—"Yes, now! Only *tell* me *gently*. Is there any occasion for so much excitement? What is it?"

"Only the Australians—the Shares I mean;" said my father, with all the bloom taken off his announcement. "They've gone up to Par." It was the identity of this phrase with mine—but sounded, as one might say, in a different key—that stamped the event on my memory. He went on, bewildering me to find a meaning for:—"They won't stop there. They'll keep on going up." I thought over this so hard that I missed some dialogue. The next I remember is that my mother said faintly:—"I think perhaps a small dose might do me good. It never does any harm just before dinner." I did not wait to see whether Dr. Endicott was effectual. For I went upstairs. But upon my word I can't say whether I did this because the shares went on going up, or because my supper awaited me. It might have been either. I had not the remotest idea what my father's communication meant. Sharp little boys live in a world of misapprehensions as perverse as the foregoing, but they forget them wholesale, until some long enforced leisure, late in life, sets them a-thinking of them retail.

After that, a sense of jubilation haunts the life I recollect; it echoes with congratulations. And even at this length of time I am conscious of a certain deference shown to my father in many quarters, which considerably outran the mixture of civility for a Government official with toleration for his personal weaknesses, which had been till now the normal attitude of those quarters. One of them was—or was occupied by—The Man, Freeman, who showed it by abasing himself before my father in a way which

I am sure The Observer of Human Nature would have discriminated from the savage independence of Mr. Freeman's earlier demeanour towards his employer. In my father's absence his variation of manner took another form, conveying his indignation at the unequal distribution of wealth among classes.

I am still very fond of watching the shine come, when boots are cleaned. In those days it was a special delight to me to get down surreptitiously to the back wash'us where stood the copper with beadles in when the lid was took off, and where the knives were polished, on a board baptized with something sandy, to see Mr. Freeman do the boots, and enjoy the dawn of their glory at the critical moment. It is possible I should comment harshly on some points in Mr. Freeman's method, were I to see it done again now. I infer this from the fact that when I was last professionally shined, on an undersized headsman's block in Soho—many years ago now—I did raise objection to the adept's system of irrigation, as my delicacy prompts me to call it. He met me with the question:—"Wot's the odds if it 'its?" This boy was a good marksman. But Mr. Freeman . . . however, I need not pursue that subject. My presence in the back wash'us is all the story needs, and scraps of things forgotten come back again with its image, and the memory of its flavour.

The voice of Cook comes back, with a consciousness that the speaker has put a leg of mutton down to roast before a fire that knows how to roast it—*not* a Kitchener—and that it is turning both ways and will soon perspire and hiss. And Cook's voice reaches from the kitchen to the wash'us saying, as one that seeks a fellow-creature with whom to share some new-found interest:—" 'Ark at that, Mr. Freeman! O'ny to think!"

But The Man had been 'arking already. The conversation to which his attention was solicited, had consisted of lengths of excited communication from our housemaid, Persia,—whose name I believe was Pershore,—but whom I connected with Geography, conceded to me at intervals by Miss Evans. Her tale had been cut up into these lengths by Cook's exclamations, but neither had diverted my attention from the boots. The Man had overheard, pausing at intervals for valuable bits, like a violinist during a blank bar or two;—a violinist in a nightmare, say, with his fingering badly handicapped, and an ill-constructed bow. And his remark, in reply to Cook, was:—" *He won't give us none of it, I lay!*"

"P'raps we done nothing to deserve it!" said our housemaid. "Not *you*, at least, as I account it, Mr. Freeman!" Persia had a housemaidly cap and ribbons of an effective sort, and was prone



to address what she had to say by preference to males, almost always giving a personal turn to her remarks.

"Ner nit you, Jumpey," said Cook, using a familiar name of kitchen currency. I don't think I have ever met Cook's double negative, or disjunctive, in any other mouth.

Mr. Freeman didn't seem sure, without further particulars. "Wot did you say it mounted up to?" said he.

"Six. Thousand. Six. Hundred. Pounds and much good I hope it'll do him!" said Miss Persia in five separate short sentences, with an expressive toss of her head, conveying a sense of vague religious precept. "How much do you want for yourself, Mr. Freeman? Me Most, is all *I* say!"

The Man appeared to dwell thoughtfully—through a full blank stave of nightmare music—on the exact value of his deserts. "Couldn't say, to a 'apenny," was his comment, as he recommenced bowing. His suggestion seemed to be that six thousand six hundred pounds might be distributed, without grave injustice either way, between Cook, Persia, and himself. But though he seemed sullen, discontented, and injured, I noticed that he took special pains with my father's boots. They were to be worn on the way up in the World.

I understood from this that, somehow or other, my father had improved his relations with a large sum of money previously in other hands than his—but of course I was too young to understand what how-or-other. Also, that Mr. Freeman, The Man, grudged it him on grounds that I later learned to speak of as Communistic. His convictions as to the desirability of the redistribution of properties paying larger income-tax than his own were the same as yours and mine. But like you and me, and unlike the earlier apostles of redistribution—for instance, Jack Sheppard and Dick Turpin—he wanted it to be done officially. His faith in the identity of Right with the power of majorities sharing his own opinions, and able to enforce them, would have done credit to enthusiasm had he been capable of it. But this quality seemed in him to take the form of sulks; a fact due, as I now firmly believe, to the beverage that played so large a part in the formation of his character. He cultivated a sullen resentment against Parliamentary Government for not placing himself and his relations in independent circumstances.

If a change in the deportment of The Man towards my parents was perceived by me, no wonder I noticed that of Society. Or rather, no wonder that it began to dawn upon me that such a thing existed. I am sure I had never noticed it until then; not having,

so far, gone beyond the division of the human race into four classes, myself, my family, other people, and black men. This last subsection had been forced upon me by impostors with a taste for cheerful music, and a strange faculty of playing tambourines with all portions of their persons; but impostors, past all question, who had never been within a thousand miles of Kentucky in their lives, for all the parade of hardship they made because they would never see it again. When the idea of Society began to germinate in my mind, I excluded these nomads, for a reason. My first inferences on the subject were based on a remark of my father, coming home and welcomed by me:—"More Society, Eustace John, more Society! And more! And more!! And more!!!" At each repeat he inspected the visiting card of a caller on the side-table of the entrance hall. Whereupon I, noting the spotless surfaces, and grasping the general purpose of these accretions, did then and there exclude Ethiopian Serenaders from Society, solely on the ground of the difficulty they would have in keeping cards clean. For I had decided that *their* black came off, and had to be renewed. Society, however, became then a name for such other people, not black, as had this unaccountable card habit.

Gradually facts assumed form, and I connected together all the signs of my family's increased prosperity, and referred them definitely to their origin, stock-jobbing. At first nothing very startling resulted, though I became aware of luxury in the quality of my garments. It was not altogether welcome, because though it had been conveyed to me by Varnish often enough that little boys spoiling their clothes was sinful, her intimations had been perfunctory—certainly not heartfelt—and had been accepted by me in that sense. I believe I should have been greatly consoled for an accentuation of discipline which accompanied them, if I had still been in a position to exhibit them to Adaropposite; not—please observe—as the gentleman humming-bird makes the most of his appearance to fascinate his lady-love, but in order that I might taunt Ada with the non-possession of a velvet tunic with sugar-loaf buttons, a cap whose peak shone like a mirror, and which boasted what Varnish called *tossles*. It is so long ago that I can't tell really what these caps were made of, but I know that when they came from the shop I could see my face in them, and that they smelt clean, as though they had been sterilized; and that I still retain a consciousness of braid, without locating it. However, this was in the period of my ostracism from Ada, which continued for a long time after the wound on her nose was only a scar.

I was not however destined then to a permanent separation from

Ada; for her mother, who played the piano, and her father, who was at the Bar, were human, and subject to human impressions and weaknesses. My inquisitiveness one day found in the china dish their cards, two Mr. Montague Frasers quite flat, and one Mrs. Montague Fraser doubled back at the knees, or thereabouts. They caused my mother to say to my father—for I heard her myself:—“Those Fraser people have called from across the Square. I suppose I shall have to return it.” Whereupon my father said to me, hanging on his shoulder:—“There now, Eustace John. Now you’ll be allowed to play with Adaropposite again.” But my mother saw exception to be taken to this:—“I have never said so, Nathaniel. But I suppose it must be as you say.” She then added, discontinuously:—“For my part I always thought the people gave themselves airs. However, just as you please!” My father said, conciliatorily:—“Well, my dear! Montague F.’s a rising man at the Bar, and knows no end of good stories. And his wife plays the piano.” My mother said:—“Then as you wish it, Nathaniel, I will call, in the brougham, tomorrow afternoon.” For my parents had by this time become proprietors of a one-horse vehicle, and I knew it by its name. It lived in a stable which really belonged to our house, and which in our soberer days had been let to an affliction who never yielded up his rent except under threat of ejection. A frantic scheme for dressing up Mr. Freeman as—suppose we say, speaking broadly—Tattersall, and entrusting him with this vehicle and its horse, fell through in favour of the appointment of a young man of superhuman calmness, named Mapleson, whose mechanical respect for his employers seemed only used to cloak his scorn. My father endeavoured to combat this by adopting with him the manner of a Master of Foxhounds, and only intensified it. My own opinion is that it is useless for a Human Creature to struggle against a Groom.

Whether the rising man at the Bar and his wife who played the piano had been mesmerized by Mr. Mapleson and the brougham I cannot say. I only know that when next I perceived Adaropposite in the Square no opposition was raised to our joining company. But I am sorry to say that Ada’s attitude was cold, and that she said with a painful candour:—“I don’t like you.”

I rejoined, with a strong common sense which other young men in like circumstances might do well to reflect on:—“Then I shan’t play.” Yet we did not part then and there, as an older couple might have done, but stood in undisturbed mutual contemplation for some considerable time. I was anxious, however, to bring my new velvet tunic on the *tapis*, but did not at first see my way

to doing it without egotism. I adopted an indirect method, saying to Ada:—" *You've* not got a new frock on." This could not fail to direct her attention to the fact that I had.

But Ada piqued me by ignoring this fact. She passed my remark by, in favour of a bald irrelevant statement that might have suited Atalanta, saying simply:—"I can catch you." To our unfledged minds alternate citations of points in which each speaker claimed some advantage over the other had all the force of consecutive argument. But this did not interfere with the happiness of our association, which possessed for me a charm I failed to find in the society of my sisters. I was too young to be aware that this was human nature.

I have written on to the point where I am obliged to stop for want of paper, almost without reference to "the girls"—which was my father's collective title for my sisters then, and which my mind recognizes them by now. As soon as the matron has given me some more, which I know she will do, I must really contrive to remember something to tell about them. This that I have written shall be put by in the little locker at my bed's head. You need not be uneasy about my having all reasonable comforts. The twentieth century has begun—not without swagger, as I gather from the newspapers we get—and things are not what they were fifty years ago.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

' I SUPPOSE it was only human nature, that preference for the society of Adaropposite to that of my sisters. For it was a preference, in spite of the peculiar forms our intercourse took. It involved no condemnation of my sisters that did not arise out of the obnoxious fact of their sisterhood to myself—which, had it been perpetrated at any other small boy's expense, I should have forgiven. I perceived as an abstract truth that they might compete with other sisters in looks and accomplishments, but that that did not redeem the drawback of a common parentage.

Besides, other boys' sisters always appeared in public complete. I had had opportunities of seeing mine in an incomplete condition, and despised their appearance at such times; it was often the reverse of dashing. In my earliest youth I did not scruple to taunt them before company with details of their identity—garters and so forth. Public reprimand checked this, and at the date of Adaropposite, I was getting to be more of a man of the world. I think I was strongly influenced by refusals of Varnish to allow me to mix in Society unless I gave securities that I would not refer to my sisters' wardrobes. I endeavoured to compromise, trying to induce Varnish to accept my undertaking not to say the name of a selected garment—selected as notorious, almost infamous. But Varnish was immovable. "Just let me catch you saying any of their cloze at all, under or over, and back you come into this nursery!"

Throughout this very early period I am afraid I regarded my sisters as an agglomerate—or should I say communion?—whose clothes were all made of the same material at the same time. Perhaps I should except Gracey, who lent herself to partial excommunication to play games with me on rainy days. But these games lacked the fine sense of outlawry which gave such charm to my escapades in the Square with Ada. A vicious conformity hung about Gracey's ideas of what little boys and girls were to. This formula of speech is due to Varnish, as thus:—"You mind what you're told, young Squire! When Miss Gracey says you ain't to, you ain't to. So now you just pay attention." I didn't pay much, and did do what I wasn't to, as often as not.



This rebellious spirit may be traceable to a secret resentment against poor little Gracey's name, her full name being Grace Margaret. I could not shut my eyes to the fact that she had to be said, at dinner; hence an aroma of moral precept hung about her, a thing that would have been all very fine had Being Good been the question before the House; but that was intolerable in connection with the great objects of Life. Rainy days, however, narrowed my resources in companionship, and it had to be Gracey's, or none at all.

Still Gracey was young enough in those days to play at games, while Roberta, or Bertie, was just old enough to pretend she wasn't. She would not join in our favourite diversion, the construction of a ship with chairs for bulwarks and a stiff sofa mattress for the main deck, even though she were always allowed to be the Captain. Gracey and I took turns, either being alternately crew and Captain. Discipline was equivocal on that ship, because the crew and the Captain used to fight for the main cabin, which was only large enough to accommodate one at a time, and had to be crept into horizontally. It was an unseaworthy boat, liable to founder when neither Captain nor crew would surrender the cabin claim to the other, and remain on deck. Bertie held off, affecting superiority.

As for Ellen, she was quite old. Her teens were pending, and they very shortly after engulfed and absorbed her. Memory, fishing in the past for something contemporary to recollect in connection with Ellen, catches at Berlin Woolwork, an art and craft I regarded with favour as far as the colours of the wools went, but despised as a producer of results—kettle-holders chiefly. I enjoyed assisting in the winding of these wools; and now I come to think of it, surely this winding was out of all proportion to the craftsperson's output. It was, however, a social boon, being, according to Varnish, the only thing that kept that Young Turk quiet. I was very unhappy about the way these wools seemed to degenerate. The primal glory of the skein—so I thought—should never have been sacrificed to a miserable conversion into balls or small allowances wound on cards, and even these possessed a richness and charm that vanished as they became incorporated into kettle-holders or more ambitious chair-backs, with stairs running round the outline of the design. I remember a *magnum opus*; swans with a crimson atmosphere, boldly gradated, for background; and how I looked back with regret to the splendour of that atmosphere in its skein-days. I must admit, however, that the same feeling has haunted my whole life in respect of artist's materials of all sorts, before and after The Artist has spoiled them. Unsullied can-

vasses, virgin tubes of colour, truthfully labelled; hog-hair brushes with clean handles, and sables still fluffy from their makers' hands, unlicked by Philistines who have doubted their point—and deserved to be thumbscrewed—all these things have always been joys to my heart, and best kept safe out of the way of The Artist. He is not to be trusted and will certainly put something in broadly with them if he gets at them, and won't wash the brushes, and will leave the caps off the colours and sit down on them, and will one day do some more to it—the something—only he will first have the canvas put on a new stretcher and gain half an inch at the top. No reasonable person can wonder at my preference for the wool in its protoplastic form of skeins.

Roberta does not connect herself with any particular thing or incident, except Miss Evans, who might rank as either from my point of view, being distinctly more an institution than a young lady with pretensions to good looks, which I conceive might have been thought by most people a fair way to classify her at that date. I feel confident now that a judge of women would have said so; but, at seven, I was not one—nor indeed, later. Her good looks may have been numerous for anything I could tell, but they were spoiled for me by one bad look, the one that disapproved of boys. We were antipathetic, confessedly. She and my two elder sisters presented themselves to me as a league, countenanced by my mother, but kept in check—discouraged from murder, for instance,—by my father. All my impressions of that date were deemed to change, within what now seems an inexplicably short time when I count its actual year-measurement, but which presented itself to my early manhood as the current era—the span of known history. If I were writing my life I should omit all this, as unimportant. What connection has my nursery antipathy to Miss Evans with any event that made it what it became, later? Simply nothing at all. But I remember it as a phase of childhood, and as such give it a passing word.

In the five years that followed, my sisters must have changed, although my memory is torpid as to the manner how. They grew larger, but otherwise, remained, for me, sisters *et præterea nihil*. I think a languid curiosity stirred me when Ellen's first long dress came from the maker's, as to what she would look like in it. I don't know whether younger brothers generally take much interest in the gradual disappearance of their sister's ankles from the public ken. Mine was certainly of the most languid and perfunctory description. My decision, when I saw Ellen in her new guise, was that she looked like a conscious impostor, a make-believe

young lady, when every one knew she was only one of my sisters. I thought my father looked disconcerted at the result, and my mother impatient and angry, causing me to ascribe to her a mental comparison between her own figure at seventeen and that of her daughter. I heard her say to my father, aside:—"What I can have done I do not know, Nathaniel, to deserve a daughter whom you may gloss over, but who is nevertheless a scarecrow." My father said dejectedly:—"She'll fill out, Cæcilia, she'll fill out." My mother contrived to show her incredulity, without doing anything capable of description. I need not say that they supposed that this conversation reached their own ears alone.

My memory, however languid it may be about my sisters at this date, is not so about many personalities that should, I suppose, have interested me less—The Man, for instance. By some strange fatality all the events in which he took part actively remain still in my mind, or easy to recall. Why should a husky habit of speech, a flavour of a wardrobe, very thick boot-soles and a vice of pedalling too frequently in unexpected places, have a charm for male youth, even when it connects none of these characteristics with beer. They retained their power over me till after I was promoted from boyhood to schoolboyhood and I regarded them, I think, as evidence of sobriety, having so often heard it mentioned in connection with them. My recollection of Mr. Freeman within a couple of years after he unpacked those boxes is that of a sinner who repented more and more frequently, always qualifying himself for each successive repentance in the intervals. Each time this occurred my father swore it should be the last time. But Mr. Freeman seemed to have an inexhaustible credit at the Bank of Patience, and might no doubt have gone on drawing increasing cheques indefinitely, had nothing happened to interrupt him. Just at the time of which I write he was still attached to the mansion, having passed through a recent acknowledgment of his weakness, his evil behaviour. He had induced my father for the fiftieth time to overlook it this once, and had resumed his duties under a promise to take the pledge, if by any conceivable chance another lapse from virtue should occur. An agreement, as it were, to make a Lease. But I don't believe The Man ever took the pledge; which is connected with my belief that he never broke it. I have no doubt had he done both, he would have repeated both, *da capo ad libitum*.

Varnish remained, unchanged. I cannot picture Varnish to myself as subject to alteration of any sort. If the question had been raised by any slight fluctuation on her part during the thirty following years, I should have imputed it to a variation in the

character of identity; a wavering of the rock-bed of existence, to which she felt bound to make concession, in order that her relation to the officially Imputable should remain intact. But her *vis immutatrix naturae* was not contagious, for all the other servants—only really I can recollect very little about any of them—varied like Scientific finals; but with this difference, that no decision of Science is ever rescinded until a new one is ready to take its place; while on the other hand no substitute for a new cook or housemaid was ever sought for—by my mother, at least—until the outgoing one had had a month's warning. I think, though, that Anne Pershore, or Persia, or Jumpey, left us to marry a Professed Trousers-Maker, and a cousin of hers took her place. But for some reason Jumpey did not go on the day her cousin came; so they overlapped, and I am sorry to say quarrelled. So do the views of Science when the old certainties and the new overlap. Jumpey and her cousin may be forgiven. How often her place had been refilled during this five years I cannot say. As my world enlarged—as, for instance, those great beings my schoolmasters came into it—the world of early babyhood grew small and dwindled. I learned to despise it then. My old age is vexed to remember no more of it.

Written for its writer's sake, mere reminiscence, rich in triviality, does not pall. For its reader it is another matter; he must weary of it, sooner or later. I have throughout assumed his non-existence, to justify an attempt to disinter so much of my childhood while its memories are yet pleasant to me. As the store—or the contents of the sepulchre, if you will—begin to fail me, I flinch from the writing of what follows, though in a sense it is easier to write. Easier, because events cease to be mere flashes of vision, seen through a mist, and become the thread of a record that is indelible from my mind, whether I write it or not. If I were to write it now in full, would it thereafter, I wonder, weigh less upon me. At least it is worth the trying. I have always had a lenient feeling towards confession, but as a mental luxury only, soothing to one's egotism; not with any view to absolution.

As time went on, and my eyes opened on the world about me, I came to be aware that, somehow or other, my father got richer and richer. It was not only that all the appurtenances of life grew more costly; indeed that alone might have failed to reach my understanding, as I had always conceived—like most boys, surely—that my father's resources were essentially equal to any strain upon them, though he might disburse reluctantly. Other informa-



tion reached me, and showed me what my father had, as I think, wisely kept me in ignorance of. I have the clearest possible recollection of the place and the occasion. Looking back now, it seems to me strange that what was to my mind European History then, should only live now in the memory of an old man whom all have forgotten, so far as his knowledge goes, of his schoolfellows of the past. Some still live, no doubt, who would remember the place. Boys never forget their schools. But to the best of my belief, I shall name no names but those of the departed in telling the occasion.

If this is ever seen and read by a boy of my school—those of my own time grow fewer every day now—he will remember at once by its name the Long Room or Room K. It comes before me as I write this now, a very, very long image of a room; probably twice the length of the room itself ever was, with twice the number of long desks too narrow to write on with comfort, each pitted at intervals with a socket for a leaden inkpot of a constipated nature; an inkpot to strike a chill into the heart of authorship and thwart its inspirations. Of all the hopeless enterprises of my experience, the getting of another dip of ink at a penultimate stage of the activity of these inkpots was the most hopeless. A moral flavour of intense discouragement, and a physical one of stale sandwiches, hangs about exhausted ink-supply to this day, for me. But the latter aroma pervades every memory of my school days. It was an ever-present inheritance from a countless multitude of bygone sandwich-tins, belonging to the majority of the boys who did not go home to dinner at a quarter-past-twelve, but filled the playground in fine weather; and, when driven into shelter by rain, disposed of themselves, Heaven knows how, in and about the empty class-rooms. Of these at such times the Long Room was one of the most popular.

I was a boy that went home to dinner. I had on leaving my last class to pass through this room, and on the occasion of which I write it was filling rapidly with boys of all ages and sizes, driven in by a heavy thunder-shower. Boys with no organized resource under such circumstances naturally turn their minds to the molestation and oppression of boys weaker than themselves. A spirit of Imperialism shows itself.

I had been detained as a penalty for some trivial transgression, and by the time I came out of my class-room the Long Room had become a scene of anarchy. A fiction existed that this room was in all offtimes to afford a refuge to the studious. But the studious cannot do Euclid or Virgil—that is what such like miscellaneous



items of school aliment are for, to be "done"—when the lawless scour round them, climb over them, use their books as missiles, put foreign matter down their backs, capsize their seats, yell close at their ears, and distract their minds by mis-statements of current events.

The boy that I have spoken of as my informant about my father's increasing resources was qualified to give information on this point, for his old brother, as he called him, was "in the City," and knew about these things. When I came out into the Long Room this boy, Montague Moss, was sitting cross-legged like a tailor, with his chin in his hands, deep in a book. As I was passing him, I was suddenly caught by a special persecutor of mine, who forced me down on a bench and sat upon me, to the great delight of other lawless characters. This odious tyrant was a boy named Nevinson, who had white eyelashes and freckles. He was dreadfully strong, and had a most offensive supercilious manner. He was a Wit, or at least had the reputation of being one; but whether this was deserved, or a mere result of his own opinion of his powers, endorsed by the subserviency of his admirers, I know not. He was always surrounded by a circle of sycophants, who only awaited the opening of his lips to burst into laughter which I cannot help thinking some of them could have controlled. At least, I am certain they exaggerated and intensified it on this occasion because their idol was astride on the object of his satire—videlicet myself—who was powerless to resent their offensive endorsement of it. I should certainly have tried to do this against any boy of my own size, had I not been obsessed by a superior power.

The conversation, which engaged the attention of other boys outside the group of which I was the unwilling centre, turned upon the respective employments, professional or otherwise, of the various boys' fathers, Nevinson giving an abstract, to the best of his belief, of such instances as were known to him.

"*Your* governor, little Bloxom," he said, "is a stinking purveyor of goat's milk to the Royal Family. It stinks. *Your* governor, little Kibblewhite, is a stinking Attorney with a bag."

"He yain't. He's a Solicitor." But little Kibblewhite, having dared this contradiction, got near the door, to make a bolt if pursued.

But my tyrant wouldn't desert me, as I hoped he would. He warmed to his topic. "Little Pascoe's governor," he said, "is a stinking Jew stockjobber."

This was too much for Montague Moss, who was Hebrew to the

backbone. He was ready with a trenchant repartee on my behalf. "Your father," he shouted to Nevinson, "is a stinking potato salesman."

"Yours," replied Nevinson, with an affectation of serene superiority, "is a stinking old clothesman." Then he added, referring to a wriggle of mine; for I thought I might get away, "you lie still, little Pascoe, or I'll give you bones in the stomach. See if I don't!"

I lay still, the victim of irresistible circumstance. But my torments were not to be for long. For the exasperation of my tormentor's manner, backed by his minions' offensive delight, shown by dancing and pointing at the object of their derision, was such that no son of any self-respecting old clothesman could be reasonably expected to endure it. Montague Moss, or Cooky, as he was called—no doubt for some reason, but I never knew it—went straight for Master Nevinson and the two were over on the floor, pummelling one another with heartfelt ill-will, before I could recover my footing and my parcel of books. I was frightened at the chaotic joy of the gathering throng of boys—for they swarmed from Heaven knows where as the rumour flew of battle toward; the cry being merely "Cooky and Nevinson"—and got away as quick as I could to lock up my books, which I never carried home with me at midday. I was overdue at home, and very ready for dinner. A torrent of boys swept by me to a rendezvous below, good for fights; they followed on the heels of the two champions, in charge of older boys who were going to see fair, and enjoy the battle.

I have felt sorry since that I did not see it. But I was really only just out of the nursery—scarcely nine years old—and the savagery that is understood to be desirable in the formation of the male character was still to come, in my case. I saw what brought it home to me though. For being late on my return, I slipped in a puddle and got muddy. Going to the wash-house made and provided for such contingencies, to clean up, I heard from its dark recesses a gasping sound of sobs and angry mutterings, and when my eyes pierced the obscurity, saw Nevinson. But *quantum mutatus!* There are some complexions that show weals and bruises to the worst advantage. His was one. He turned furiously on me when he saw me. "You cheesy young sneak!" he exclaimed. "It was all your fault. You come here and I'll murder you."

I felt the injustice of the accusation so keenly that I wanted to expostulate. For the affair had been no fault of mine. I wanted too an explanation of the adjective applied to me. I had always understood that it was the equivalent of choice, or super-excellent.

But so hideous to me was the darkness of the place, and its taint of blood—for I could see how the basin-water had been stained—so hideous the swelled lips and discoloured eyes of its only occupant, inarticulate with pain and mortification; so hideous above all his rage, that I fled in terror of it. The poor wretch's misfortunes had not ended however, for next day he and his opponent were sent for by the head-master, and given five hundred lines, for fighting.

I suppose that any person on whose stomach the recipient of a challenge chances to be seated is in some sense morally involved in the battle when it comes off, and that I am at fault in wondering why this affair led to my becoming such fast friends with the boy Cooky. It certainly did, although he was so much my senior; and the friendship began by my walking home with him two days later. It was what Cooky said to me during that walk that opened my eyes to my father's wealth, and its sources. Here is our conversation:

"I say, Cooky. Can't Nevinson learn by rote like you can?"

"*He?*—not *he!* He can't learn up three lines in an hour. I said mine yesterday. Five hundred lines of Ovid's nothing." And Cooky began reciting with fiendish rapidity, "*Spargere quae fratris lacerata per agros,*" and got through a hundred lines in no time, checking each off on his fingers, and coming to "*emeruitque virum,*" "*ten*"—and so on up to a hundred, when he stopped, saying:—"It's all like that. You'll see when you come to do Ovid."

I was impressed, but was sick at heart to think of the fate of Nevinson, who had as I thought suffered enough in all conscience. "Will he be kept in every day till he's said all the lines?" I asked.

"Every day. And if he doesn't do it this term he'll have to begin again next. Poor beggar!"

"But I say, Cooky, that's not fair——" I hesitated, unable to define the wicked injustice of the penalty in three words.

"Oh yes, it is," said my new friend. "Because he called my father a stinking old clothesman, and I only called his a stinking potato salesman. Stinking was the same for both." By which he meant that the expression might be written off both sides of the account, not that the aroma of both parents was identical. No language could do justice to the absolute gravity and good faith with which this point was discussed. Boys are miraculous creatures.

"Is his father a potato salesman?" I asked.

• "Not he! At least, I don't know anything about him."

"I say, Cooky——"

"What, little Pascoe?" Then incidentally:—"You're a nice little beggar, and I mean to give you a top."

After saying doubtfully, "Shall I be able to spin it?" I pursued my question. "I say, Cooky, though, *is* your father *really* an Old Clothesman?" I felt seriously concerned.

"Of course he is!" said Cooky. "With three hats!"

I felt ready to cry; for, boylike, I had already got very fond of my new friend, and we were sauntering homewards in that happy companionship that I firmly believe only boys enjoy in the same degree. His arm was round my neck, and if he did occasionally tickle or punch me slightly the main issue remained unaffected. But presently I saw a glimmer of hope, and renewed the conversation. "I say, Cooky, Nevinson said my father was a——" I stopped, with a natural diffidence.

"Stinking Jew Stockjobber," said Cooky, unblushingly.

"Well, but that wasn't *true*," said I. And I spoke in such a rueful tone that I suppose my repugnance to the description was manifest.

"Why shouldn't your father be a Jew Stockjobber? My old brother's a Jew Stockjobber." Then he seemed to remember that there was a risk of an important point being lost sight of, for he added:—"Of course 'stinking' is only a way of putting it." It did not seem to occur to either of us that it was an extraordinary or abnormal way. It merely emphasized.

I did not like to disclaim my father's Judaism too roundly; it might have seemed censorious towards Cooky's old brother; but I was very anxious for illumination on the main question. So I went to the point, saying:—"What *is* a Stockjobber, Cooky?"

"I'll tell you, little Pascoe," said he; but he considered a minute, to see how I could be got to understand. "I should say he was a chap that sold things for double the money.—That sort of thing."

"Double what he gives for them?"

"No—four times what he gives for them. He only gives half the money for them. Shares in concerns, you know; not things in shops. That's trade."

"Oh!" said I. I don't believe Cooky knew much more about the matter than I did.

"Your governor's not a Tradesman, you know!"

"Of course not!" My soul rose against the suggestion, and I added, with dignity,—"My father's in Somerset House." I was not asked, fortunately, what my father did there.

Cooky pursued the subject, fighting shy of close definitions. "My old brother says he never came across any one like your father. He says it's a sort of inspiration." Seeing me look puzzled, he added:—"Like a Prophet!" But this made it no clearer, for an obvious reason. And I don't know to this day how the phonetic school of spellers discriminates between *prophet* and *profit*, unless it ignores the vulgar tongue. However, as soon as this point was cleared, my friend enlarged on the topic enthusiastically. "My old brother," he said, "knows, because he buys and sells for your governor. He says that three years ago he tried to stop your governor buying a lot of rotten shares. But your governor was too sharp, and bought 'em all for nothing. They're worth a pot now—a pot of money, I mean."

Cooky was silent in a sort of ecstasy at my governor's intrepidity and success. I too was silent, but because I was uneasy at the laxity of his language. My reflections found voice at last in the question:—"What sized pot?" So much seemed to me to depend on the size of the pot.

"Oh, you little Ass!" said he, with the sweet candour of boy-hood. "What does it matter? Any size. You want everything like Tit-tat-toe." Exhilarating passages in this game had preceded this walk home. The game itself is prosaic, though the poem that mysteriously accompanies it is ornate with imagery. Cooky resumed:—"My old brother says that last year Railways went down to nothing, and there was a panic. And your governor came to him and made him buy all the worst Railway Script on the market. He put every penny he'd got before on it. And three months after they were a hundred per cent above par." I asked Cooky what this meant, and he wouldn't admit he didn't know, avoiding elucidation, but saying vaguely that I should "find it all right." You see, he was really Classics; not Mathematics or Arithmetic at all.

Reflecting on my school friend's exposition of the mysteries of gambling on the Bourse, I am gratified to note in it marks of the deeply-rooted popular belief, that everything that is has a fixed, inherent, intrinsic, deep-rooted, unchangeable value in gold, and in gold alone. The idle pretensions of silver and copper may be dismissed without comment—mere currency! While as to turnips and the like—fancy a value in turnips! I am gratified, because it shows that Varnish was right about her Bible,—or, at least, that she had popular opinion on her side—when she enjoined upon me that I should handle that precious volume carefully and not run dogs-ears into the "profitable annotations on all the hard places,"



insomuch as it was "worth two pounds." When, many many years later, in days that have since become the Past, I got for its owner four pounds for this volume, she was stricken in conscience, and would hardly accept the money, on the grounds that it was—and had been, in the nature of things, ever since my nursery days—worth two precisely.

But though Cooky Moss' ideas on business were vague, he repeated his old brother's words accurately enough, and gave me a much improved insight into the sources of my father's new-found wealth. As far as I can judge—for my father never made me his confidant, his run of luck must have continued for over three years from the date of this conversation with Cooky. I believe that during this period he more than once repeated his seeming utter recklessness,—flinging all his past winnings magnificently on the roulette table, and vexing the souls of the *croupiers* of the Bank of Ill-luck he played against—and won. For a while his name was a sort of byword on the Stock Exchange, where every operator knew what "Paseoe's Luck" meant, and prayed for it.

I recollect afterwards hearing him say to Mr. Stowe, the gentleman with the eyes aslant:—"My dear Scritchey, I tell you I'm right. They say Fortune favours the bold. But where would the boldness come in if I ran no risk of losing all my stakes?" I now understand his meaning. If he had always put by half his winnings and gambled with the rest, his pluck would have made a poor show by comparison. I believe he regarded the cash he received for the *Heliconides* as so much sheer gambler's stakes. And certainly this view seemed to make him a favourite with fortune.

It was this conversation with Cooky that first set me thinking seriously on the subject of my father's increase of wealth. It was pursued through the whole length of a walk full of unwarrantable *detours*, ending in our seeing each other to our respective homes alternately, three or four times. At our final doorstep—my father's to wit—we referred to Nevinson, and the fact that he was still kept in, grinding at his hopeless task, without a brain! Cooky looked sorry for him, saying:—"Poor beggar—it's cruel hard lines!" Then an idea occurred to him, and he said it wasn't a bad one. Gently pressed to reveal it, he divulged a scheme for taking Nevinson's imposition on his own shoulders. "I could knock it all off by Saturday," said he. He treated the matter as though the sole essential was that five hundred lines of Ovid should be gabbled through without book in a way that would have made the author's blood curdle, had the pronunciation of the words been such as to enable him to find out who wrote them.

I suppose one becomes unduly suspicious—or, perhaps, ill-tempered—in old age; and that is why I find myself doubting whether Cooky's motive was unmixed good-nature. Was there no vainglory in it? After all, what a splendid position it would land him in, to reel off, in a few hours, all those hexameters that his late adversary had only been able to struggle through a fraction of in about as many days!

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

WHATEVER goes wrong in a family that includes very young people, they look upon it as sure to come right. No doubt of the practical omnipotence of their parents crosses their mind, as regards all domestic matters. My impression is that though a boy ascribes to his meanest schoolmaster an Olympian quality his male parent lacks, he only does so in respect of a great mysterious world that does not overlap his father's. This world and his domestic world have nothing in common, and his belief to this effect would even survive his conviction that they occupied the same space.

Even so it is with all the many Æthers Science is bestowing on us. They—poor souls!—have only one Space, and that one of only three dimensions, to accommodate the lot. Yet the waves of Sound cut the waves of Light dead, neither moving when they meet, and Wireless Electricity ignores both, like Trabb's Boy. But so far as I know, no undulations of any Æther look down on that of their neighbours.

A schoolboy, on the contrary, looks down on all his home belongings, as against his schoolmasters. Does he not, the moment that he comes to know anything of their homes and possessions, go back to his own and flaunt their superiority in the face of all his circle who will stop to listen to him? But this does not affect his belief in the omnipotence of his parents in *their* puny world. *He* does not need to trouble himself about the Future. *They* will see to all that.

Therefore when my father and my Uncle Francis came to loggerheads about some point in the management of my mother's marriage settlement, I was content in my belief that my father was absolutely right, and my Uncle Francis absolutely wrong.

It was Varnish who told me what they had come to, and though I had never seen a loggerhead to my knowledge, I at once discerned its nature from its context, and admitted its linguistic force—a force that explanation would seriously interfere with, to my thinking. At this time I was no longer under the tutelage of Varnish, for I was a schoolboy of three years standing, a good

cricketer of my years, and well up in my classes; though that was a matter of less importance. Varnish and I, however, were on terms of mutual devotion that no addition of distinction to my own position could shake, and may be said to have been in the heart of each other's confidence on all subjects.

Also at this time a change was made in my sleeping apartment, which brought me very much indeed into the pocket of that of my parents; more so perhaps than they themselves would have approved, had they been fully aware of it. At least they would not have talked so loud, had they rightly appreciated the audibility of conversation carried on in their own bedroom, which looked out on the Square, through the wall of my corresponding back room, which looked out chiefly on cats and their habits. I wasn't eavesdropping at all, in the dishonest sense; indeed I used frequently to boast to my father of how much I had heard of their talk, repeating passages as proof thereof. I must suppose, therefore, that when they spoke audibly they were either indifferent as to whether I heard or not; or believed me asleep. At times, no doubt, they forgot me as either would now and then respond with a dropped voice to the shish-shish, or suchlike *pianissimo* direction, of the other. It was generally my mother who entered protest, saying, "You needn't shout," or, "I can hear you perfectly well, Nathaniel," in a cold suggestive manner. Whenever voices became inaudible in this way, I always went under the bedclothes conscientiously, until I conceived, from a change in tone, that Europe was at liberty to overhear. The weak point of the system was that at late hours they were apt to take it for granted that I was asleep.

It was after a recess of this kind, occasioned by a rather warm discussion becoming veiled, with a subacute indication of strained relations, that I came up to breathe, as speech became normal, and heard my mother say:—"Very well, Nathaniel, very well! Consult a lawyer by all means but let me go to sleep." At which broad hint, my father held his tongue.

I surmise that he held it tighter than was absolutely necessary under the circumstances. He might have said good-night, or made some sign of a conciliatory nature. As it was, I could not have been more morally certain that he shut his lips abruptly, if his mouth had been a trunk, and the lid had come suddenly down. Naturally my mother was not prepared to acquiesce in this. Nothing is more offensive than to be taken at your word when you don't mean it. And you cannot go to sleep while exasperated.

But I don't believe her wish for sleep was a sincere one. Unless indeed she slept then and there for some fifty seconds, and then

awoke with an unnaturally clear idea of what to say next. For, thereabouts, her words were—and they were, one might say, almost viciously articulate:—"I really do not know what you can possibly mean, Nathaniel, by saying that you are not trying to lay the blame at the door of my brothers——"

My father interrupted. "Nobody's blaming anybody," said he, briefly.

"I *wish* you would let me finish. That is just what I was going to say—— Oh dear!—now you've put it all out of my head——"

"To lay the blame at the door of my brothers," my father repeated, quoting my mother's previous speech.

My mother picked up the thread of her discourse, with what seemed to me an unwarranted confidence. "Precisely. The money is all there, and has never been anywhere else. So what the Lord Chancellor can possibly have to say on the matter I cannot the least imagine."

"No more can I."

"Then, what is all this temper and prevarication for?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"Nathaniel, that is ungenerous of you. It is an attempt to provoke me by insinuating that it is *I* that have lost my temper, when you know perfectly well that the reverse is the case. The exact reverse in every respect. But I will not allow you to provoke me, and you know it is useless. Listen now and—if you will have patience—I will tell you exactly what my brother Francis *did* say, and then you can attack him as you like. And I may mention, Nathaniel, that it was not only Francis, but his friend Mr. Thomas Skidney, who endorsed that opinion; and that I think few judgments are entitled to greater weight. Indeed I have heard both my brothers say frequently that the reason Mr. Skidney has not taken silk is——"

"Oh, he's a lawyer then? I thought he was in the City. Oh yes—that'll do!—the Inner Temple's in the City, of course. But go on with what Francis said."

"It tries me to talk when I am so interrupted. But I will tell you if you will listen. My brother stated the case with the clearness which I am sure his worst enemy could not refuse to entertain." My mother then went on to state it with some prolixity, the upshot being that my Uncle Francis had virtually put in a claim, as my mother's trustee, for both the stakes and the winnings in my father's successful gamblings of the last four years, on the ground that the original fund, being the result of the sale of settled property, should by rights have been invested



in some eligible stock sanctioned by the Court of Chancery. But that as the fund had been otherwise employed in the interim, it would be competent to the Trustees to claim it now, "subject to any depreciation or improvement in its value."

I was getting very sleepy by this time, and I suspect that I do not really recollect my father's reply. It is an automatic concoction of my brain from the reaction of subsequent knowledge on the hazy impression of the moment.

"Then your brother should have said so at first, instead of consenting," is the answer I seem to remember, before oblivion shrouds the dispute in the next room in nothingness. But I am sure of one thing, that so far from my mother showing any wish to go to sleep, she appeared to grow more and more emphatic—perhaps I should say quarrelsome—and I have no doubt the wrangle lasted well on into the night.

I came to know in time what position had been taken up by my father and my uncles respectively, the latter being two out of three trustees of my mother's marriage settlement; a deed framed, like its like, for the creation of family discord, and to supply the legal member of the family with a theme to employ his legal acumen on. Oh, the happiness of writing for no readers, without the ghost of a compliment to any Grundy!

My father justified his employment of the Heliconides money in reckless speculation on two grounds; one that no reference was made to those Art treasures in the Settlement itself, the other that the old box in which they were found had been deposited without reservation in the Mecklenburg Square attic long after that document was signed and sealed, when my grandmother moved into her new house at Highbury, the long lease of the Admiral's old house at Peckham Rye having expired. He had frequently suggested that this box and its fellows should be returned to my grandmother, but that decisive old lady had as frequently refused to receive them, on the plea that a noxious insect had appeared when one was partly opened, and had got away unsquashed, owing to the want of presence of mind of a girl named Anne Tucker, who was no better than she should be. My grandmother's introduction of irrelevant matter into conversation was not furtive, but audacious and unblushing, and she used any *riposte* as applicable to any thrust. The superseding interest of Anne Tucker's frailty always put an end to any attempt of my father to get this property back into the possession of its owner.

My uncle, no doubt alarmed at the dazzling recklessness of my father's operations on 'Change, was engineering his position as a

Trustee to capture as much as might be of the gambler's winnings before the fatal day arrived on which the croupier's rake should sweep in the whole pile, and leave the speculator bankrupt. The weakness of his entrenchments lay in the fact that they were, so to speak, *arrières-pensées*; that he should in fact have laid claim to the prizes when their value was first discovered. Instead of doing this, he had unfortunately been among the earliest counsellors of reckless speculation. My father was always able to remind my mother of the sagacious counsel in worldly wisdom that she had brought back from her Sunday visits to Highbury. As time passed my Uncle Francis had found it convenient to forget these, or had taken refuge in a shifty distinction between his advice given as an unconcerned bystander, and his official decisions as a Trustee, spoken *ex cathedra* with a sense of his obligation to the sacred Settlement.

I can recollect a special conversation between him and my mother, in a Sunday afternoon conclave at Highbury, in which he recapitulated and rounded off his standpoint—these words are his, not mine. It occurred shortly before the conversation between my parents given above, and was probably the cause of it. My grandmother's chair was empty; she was keeping her bed as a protection against bitter cold weather. But a folding door, incompletely unfolded by about two degrees, allowed her voice passage-way. For she slept on the same floor, and neither she nor her high-backed chair on wheels was visible in the drawing-room on this particular Sunday.

"Put it that way if you like, Cæcilia," said my uncle to my mother, as he stood before the roasting fire, caressing the welcome heat with leg-wriggles. "But that's what you had better tell Nathaniel. Tell him from me." And my uncle kept on taking snuff with an eye on my mother; only one, because the other shut itself to accommodate the inhaling nostril.

"Tell him what?" asked mother. For I believe Uncle Francis had referred to something purely visionary.

However, the vision must have been a vivid one, inasmuch as he then embarked without fear on what professed to be a crisp abstract of something much longer. Its effect was that the Heliconides never were my father's own to put up to auction, and that even if they had been, the sum they realized, as well as the usufruct thereof, would have belonged to the Settlement. Whatever investment my father had made of this sum, he had made on his own responsibility without consulting his co-Trustees, and as their supineness would have been held to relieve my father from

responsibility for loss on a bad investment, they were equally entitled to all profit accruing from a good one. The same argument applied to subsequent employment of such profits, and the Settlement, in short, was entitled to benefit by the whole of my father's successful speculations.

I fancy I have heard that it is a legal maxim that no man can profit by his own neglect. Or am I imputing common sense to Law? If there is such a maxim, I have no doubt my uncle knew it. But he was relying on my father's Arcadian simplicity when he propounded this very singular claim. He actually proceeded to justify his argument by the fact that a criminal misappropriation of cash cannot be atoned for by a simple refund after detection, even with interest; and he had the effrontery to wind up with "What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander—*ch, Cæcilia!*"

"I cannot undertake to follow you through all the legal aspects of this subject," said my mother, when my uncle, whose views had received support at intervals from my grandmother through the door, brought them to an end very much to his own satisfaction. "But this I will say, that I do not understand why Trustees should not be at liberty to consult the interest of their relations by more advantageous investments than they do at present. That they might do so without risk is surely a lesson we may learn from my husband's experience. They would not need to run any more risks than he has, merely following the guiding rule of investment in approved securities at a high rate of interest." My mother warmed to her subject, and went on to sketch a system of investment in concerns which should give a statutory undertaking to refund the price of the shares in the event of the non-success of their enterprise. I have always thought this a capital idea, and wished commercial people would take it up. It is as good as the notion, familiar to so many advanced reformers, of throwing the burden of taxation entirely on the undeserving classes—capitalists, land-owners and the like.

My uncle replied to these suggestions on well-worn lines, saying it was easy to be wise after the fact, and so forth. He dwelt upon his duty as a Trustee, and on his own liability to the Court of Chancery. But I don't think my mother paid much attention to what he said. In these discussions she always endeavoured to keep in view her own superiority to dress, her natural position as moral arbiter, and her claim to sagacity in worldly matters. She resumed the subject with a due sense of these responsibilities. "What you say, Francis, would undoubtedly hold good in any ordinary case. In that of, a mere speculator, the appropriation of a trust-fund to

what you choose to call gambling purposes would be unwarrantable, because of the risk. In the hands of my husband, as events have shown, the result was a certainty. That being now proved, it seems to me that Nathaniel will do all that can be expected of him if, as I suggest, he pays into the Trust a sum equal to the exact value at this moment of the two vases that were sold three years ago for twelve hundred pounds. That can be easily ascertained by inquiry in the proper quarters." My mother paused, with dignity. She was evidently proud of the way she stated her views.

I don't believe my uncle was equal to pointing out at a moment's notice the rich crop of fallacies that flourished in my mother's garden of accepted phrases. I rather think he said, *sotto voce*, "Women don't understand these things," or something to the same popular effect. I am sure he was not sorry when my granny's voice came through the door, none the clearer for a slight bronchial threatening.

The old lady's exordium took in detail all the persons involved in the discussion, enjoining the two present not to be fools, and directing them to tell my father and any one disposed to take his part, not to be fools either. She then went on, addressing my Uncle Francis:—"You just use your wits, Frank, and get at Nathaniel's money before he squanders it all away, and put it out of his reach. Put it in a safe investment, and don't be an idiot." She then dwelt on a painful experience of her early youth, how a cousin of hers, Crofton Skipwith—hers was a family with connections—had won thirty thousand pounds of the Prince Regent, and would have died a rich man instead of a pauper, if only he would have stopped playing at the right time. Also, consider Mr. Skidney's friend on the turf who won twenty-four thousand on the favourite and lost forty-two on Saucy Sally the same day. Consider these and other cases, and hinder Nathaniel from behaving like a fool.

My uncle walked the length of the room and back, and gave the radiant heat a short chance to get out into public life. But he soon intercepted it again; and, after a silence which I suppose was due to the shock of the cold from an Arctic bay-window he had looked at a lamplighter through, spoke thus to my mother:—"You see what mamma says—eh, Cæcilia?"

He then proceeded to eulogize Mr. Skidney, or Little Tommy, as he called him. He wasn't showy. He wasn't one of your new-fangled Bayswater stuck-uppers, strutting and swelling about. He wasn't much to look at. But for powers of reflection and ratiocination, no one would believe in the amount of thinkin' that man would get through in a day. And for sound advice on worldly



matters, all my uncle said was:—"Give Little Tommy a mild Havana, and don't hurry him."

"But, my dear Francis," said my mother, "what did Mr. Skidney say this time, when he got his Havana? *That's* what I want to get at."

"Little Tommy said, Cæcilia, when I told him my views, that no run of luck lasts for ever, and that the sooner your husband put forty thousand pounds or so into settlement the better for you and him, and the worse for his creditors when he bursts up, which is according to me the point we ought to keep in view—when I said this to Little Tommy, he shut one eye and said:—'You stick to that, Wiggy!' It wasn't much in words, but Tommy has a manner with him, that speaks volumes." Have I mentioned that Wigram was my mother's maiden name?

My uncle dwelt for some time on the great value and weight of Mr. Skidney's judgments, and on their perfect accord with his own. But he did not report these judgments at length, and indeed they seemed to have been oracular in character, like the above.

My mother had a most disconcerting habit of sudden abdication; only the word is not strong enough. One cannot say those spiders abdicate, who, if they wish to avoid your notice, vibrate so rapidly as to become invisible. This habit of my mother's was apt to assume the form of intentional somnambulism. Perhaps one might more properly say intentional Nirvana. Anyhow, at this point she closed her eyes, and after remaining motionless for some seconds, said submissively:—"I am in your hands."

Said my uncle unexpectedly:—"Oh, of course, if you are going to take that tone, I can't talk." He took snuff *pianissimo*, but *sostenuto*, slightly adjusting his nostrils with the flat of his thumb.

Said my grandmother then, as a sort of stage direction to contemporary history:—"Now temper!" Perhaps the wording, "Exasperation at this point, please, till further notice!" would have conveyed her meaning better to a perfect stranger.

My mother's "Perhaps I had better say nothing," implied toleration for individualities in her family that she was not herself subject to, and readiness for peaceful compromise in stormy situations arising from them.

To the best of my recollection my uncle, not to be behindhand in magnanimity, said:—"Perhaps we had better talk of something else." The conversation was then turned mechanically on a lukewarm topic, and languished. I went away to my sister Gracey in another room, and read books until we were summoned to depart. I am sorry to say that by that time the disputants were hammer



and tongs at the Settlement again, with no prospect of the dispute ending. The lukewarm topic had had no staying power.

The loggerheads that my father and uncle came to must have been within a measurable distance at this date, and very near at hand indeed at that of the conversation I overheard and have described between my father and mother in the silent hours of the night in Mecklenburg Square. Being young I paid very little more attention to it than if it had been cats.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

THE way in which Mr. Skidney hung about, or rather was suspended about, these controversial interchanges between my father and uncle through the medium of my mother, did not amuse me then as it came to do in after years, when my boyish acceptance of my seniors as sound and reasonable had given way to my later appreciation of most of them as Fools. It took time for me to grasp the fact that my uncle paraded an esoteric Mr. Skidney—an imaginary Being of deep thought and experience—before my mother's eyes in defiance of the palpable fact that the exoteric Mr. Skidney was a woe-begone and brainless little victim of late hours and whiskey-and-water. The image thus produced on my mother's mind grew and grew as our neat brougham—no longer a paltry fly!—bore us back to Mecklenburg Square, and was shortly exhibited to my father as that of a Bank Director in marching order, with private secretaries and appointments and mahogany drawers and things. My father's image of the little man, based on this, was I am sure that of a sort of Buddha in a Temple of Responsibility, with a chronic frown of weighty consideration in place of a happy smile intended to last for ever, but with an analogous stomach. I ascribe to my father at this date an automatic respect for the decisions of this Buddha; a pious awe of its watch-chain and gold pencil-case; a disposition, in picturing to himself its stove-pipe hat, to look for a few seconds in his own.

It may have had an influence with him in the course he took. He wrote a cheque for a sum which he arrived at by adding interest at eight per cent to twelve hundred pounds, assuming that to be the value of the *Heliconides* at the date of his marriage, counting the interest as from his wedding-day, and sent it to my uncle to pay into the Trust-fund, in clearance of his own indebtedness. My uncle, who must have known, whatever tale he told my mother, that no legal or equitable claim would have held good against my father for anything beyond the bare sale price of the vases—and that even that was doubtful—declined to accept it in discharge of this liability, and returned it to my father with a letter in which he endeavoured to work upon his feelings to induce him to

place a much larger sum in settlement, out of reach of his creditors.

After my father's death, thirty years ago, my stepmother found my uncle's letter in its envelope, with the cheque enclosed, and sent it to me. I need not say that I cannot recall much of it, but I have still a recollection of some of its phrases, which seem to indicate that the first of the loggerheads was at least in sight. It was of course wordy, and showed its writer's extraordinary capacity for satisfying his desire for a meaning with any set phrase that happened to come to hand. For instance, "However anxious we may be to disguise the fact from ourselves," is a meaningless introduction to "A Man's first duty is to his Wife and Family." If my uncle had written, "Every one must admit that a man's first duty," and so on, it would have been more rational. But then it wouldn't have sounded so majestic. I don't believe he meant to insinuate that my father was anxious to shirk his duties as a husband and parent. It was merely an excursion into sententiousness of a pen that may have been credulous enough to believe that its holder's brain was that of a cultivated man. Or it may have thought otherwise. In either case the result was the same. A loggerhead loomed in the mist, and grew daily more distinct.

As for myself during this period, I was too much absorbed in cricket and chemistry—or an engrossing delight I gave that name to—to be much impressed by family disputes. My youthful optimism decided that they were all in order and for the best, in the best of all possible worlds, subject only to a general reservation that my father was in the right. I doubt if the incident of the cheque would ever have caught and held, if it had not happened to intersect with a school-study which I resented from the bottom of my soul, called Compound Interest. I had heard my father say to my mother:—"Well, Cæcilia, I shall send Francis the cheque anyhow. And to make it all fair, and put the matter beyond a doubt, we'll make it Compound Interest." To which my mother had replied:—"You know as well as I do, Nathaniel, that you cannot do that, because Compound Interest is illegal." My father replied equably:—"Very good then! If it's illegal, Frank's a lawyer and can take out a summons, or apply for a warrant, or some game of that sort. Here, Eustace John, here's a sum for you to do. Compound Interest of twelve hundred pounds for twenty-two years at five per cent."

"Oh—that's easy!" said I, and did it. It took time though. When it was done, I handed the result to my father, saying briefly:—"Here you are!" Then a misgiving had crossed my mind, and I added:—"But I say, Pap!"

"Fire away, Son and Heir," said he.

"It is illegal, isn't it?"

"What is?"

"Compound interest."

My mother did not say:—"You have treated my opinion as worthless, and have flouted me. But you will find I am right, and Posterity will do me justice." She contrived to make an inclination of her head tell to that effect, without taking her eyes off the letter she was writing.

"We're a mighty clever young man," said my father, referring to me obliquely in the third person plural. "Who told us that story?"

"All the boys," said I. "They're quite sure of it."

"Then it *must* be true," said my father, with immovable gravity. He looked at the total I had handed him, and added:—"As it works out rather high, *and* it's illegal, suppose we say nothing about Compound Interest."

But my mother had no idea of letting my father off. She did not scruple to taunt him with catching at the illegality of Compound Interest as an excuse for making a lesser payment. It was permissible obviously to make any refund as an act of Justice or Generosity, but an indictable offence to do it as Compound Interest. He compromised the matter—I think—by fixing the amount as simple Interest at eight per cent, which my mother found satisfactory—I am pretty sure the cheque my uncle returned was for three thousand four hundred odd. One recollects hundreds, doubts tens, and forgets units with alacrity. Thousands of course are branded for ever on the tablets of Memory—heavenly records, on the right side of the account!

But the cheque was returned, and the writing of it was impressed on my mind by the unsavoury appearance of Compound Interest in the discussion. I don't think the exhibition of Compound Rhubarb could have been more unwelcome. However, it was an easy sum to do! Why!—old Cox, our schoolmaster in this department, thought nothing, for instance, of asking to have it made known to him how much would six millions two hundred and fifty-five thousand pounds nine shillings and tenpence farthing amount to in a hundred and twenty-nine years, five months, four days, six hours and eleven minutes, at five pounds eighteen and two pence three-farthings per cent! Compound Interest. Old Cox was a reincarnation of Caligula at his worst, who no doubt would have asked exactly this very question, *caeteris paribus*.

The impression on my own mind of my father's and uncle's

loggerheads, or their proximity, was that they were an inevitable condition of things, perfectly right under the circumstances, reflecting some credit on my father certainly, but no serious discredit on my uncle. I doubt too whether Varnish was right in speaking of them as actually "come to"; indeed I am doubtful whether loggerheads by post can have more than a metaphorical existence. It might have been otherwise if my father and uncle had met oftener. They might have come to angry recriminations if they had not been kept in check by the exigencies of pens and paper, the re-reading next morning of the cutting civility of the letter we thought so clever overnight. Or, *per contra*, honest scolding might have been much less irritating than such letters, rashly sent to the post by some well-meaning person who was passing a post-office and it was no trouble at all, really. I am almost sorry these lines will never meet any one's eyes, who might take advantage of my appeal to mankind, never to carry the letters of his fellow-creatures to the post, short of actual supplication to do so; or, better still, without knowing their contents. Did you *ever* feel sorry you abstained from sending that first letter, and wrote another one?

However, actually or metaphorically, strained relations existed; which Varnish described as loggerheads, and I regarded as normal and had no particular view about, except that my Governor was right. Varnish agreed with me on this point, but was equally clear my mother was wrong. Not that her speech on the subject would have conveyed her opinion to any one not in possession of all the facts. She was so often at variance with standard Dictionaries as to the precise meaning of words that she scarcely gave herself a fair chance of being understood. For instance, she said to me once:—"Your mar is that absolute, Master Eustace, fetching and carrying and telling, my only wonder is there's been no previous hot water, and I say it's a Mercy."

I perfectly understood Varnish, knowing what she referred to, but I was preoccupied with another subject. So after saying briefly and disrespectfully, "I think the mater had better shut up," I referred to it, "I say, Varnish, do you know that when granulated Zinc is treated with dilute Sulphuric Acid, commercially known as Oil of Vitriol, caloric is generated with evolution of Hydrogen, and a neutral Sulphate of Zinc remains in solution?"

"There now, Master Eustace!" said Varnish. "To think of your knowing all that Chemistry!" But she felt that Science could not be blindly relied on, and continued:—"But it smells nasty, I lay!"

"You can't smell it in the next room," said I, keeping in view a licensed course of Experimental Research to come. But I was



also concerned for the fame of Berzelius and Davy. "That's nothing!" I remarked. "You should smell Bisulphide of Carbon. *"That's something like a smell! Crikey!"*

Which reminds me forcibly—up to digression point—that this happened in the days when boys, and even grown men, said "Crikey!" to relieve astonishment, or express admiration. It is to me, if not a solemn, at least a strange thought, that unless there chances to be living some veteran, not brought up to date, who still says "Crikey!" there must have been a moment in these last years that have fled, when "Crikey!" was *actually said for the last time*. Think of it!—if we had been there and could have known it! A little landmark, but a clear one, in a journey that had left youth behind! But if ever these words are read, will he who reads them even recognize "Crikey!"?

I suppose there still are survivors of Chemistry, as I understood it; superannuated lecturers in long extinct Institutions, perhaps, who do not in their inmost hearts believe but that Carbonic Acid was really Carbonic Acid all along, not merely Carbon Dioxide. It makes me half glad to be so far from the maddening crowd, that I dare to write of Bisulphide of Carbon without fear of rebuke, knowing that it is really something else all the time. It smells just as nasty now—that's one comfort!

Varnish never smelt it, so far as I know. Had she done so, I am sure she would have been ready with a tribute, of some sort, to the memory of Berzelius and Davy. But her experience of my later researches had made her suspicious of precipitates and reactions generally, in spite of their plausible appearance and frequent apathy. My earlier ones, which followed the lines indicated in a work called *The Boy's Own Book* had been countenanced by her on the ground that nothing ever come of any such silliness, and how ever could any one expect it? Her view that the details of experiments supplied in this work were on the face of them mendacious misdirection, published to mislead the credulous with promises of concussions and sudden unwarrantable changes of colour that never came off, was not quite without justification, as witness my earliest essay towards following them out. The text boldly stated that such persons as placed a cork impaled by a short tube in the mouth of a bottle, having previously introduced "caoutchouc" into the said bottle, would be rewarded for their labours by the appearance of a jet of flame, burning at the end of the said tube, of course on application of a lighted match. My sister Gracey and I were on the tiptoe of expectation when all the arrangements were complete, but as was to be expected the fragment

of Indian Rubber we had requisitioned, from the piece known to the household as "*The India Rubber*," remained callous and stationary, and nothing ignited. Our disappointment was bitter. Having the solemn assurance of print before our eyes, we felt as though the solid earth had failed beneath our feet. Varnish was content to point out the verification of her prediction.

The only explanation I can devise for this miscarriage of Science is that possibly the writer should have said "*caoutchoucine*"; which is, I am told—unlike my Self—a spirit with a very low flashpoint. If so, it is another proof, if one were wanted, of the wisdom of using words with an eye to their meaning, without fear or favour.

I fancy that it was just as well that we should not call spirits with low flash-points from the vasty deep, in this case represented by the shop where I bought chemicals whenever funds permitted. Gracey and I might have had an explosion worse than the worst we contrived with the materials available. I remember it well. To you chlorate of potash spells lozenges for a relaxed throat; to me it is a crystalline salt which being pulverized with its own, or something else's, weight of lump sugar, acquires what in my youth I seem to have considered a desirable property—this reads as if the Pytchley Hunt would come next—but which I now regard as a drawback. Surely, even when an ill-advised bystander drops one drop of concentrated Sulphuric acid on a mixture, it is better that it should *not* explode suddenly. So I think now, but in that happy time I thought otherwise; deeming sudden explosion an advantage, and Scientific. Gracey and I powdered a perilous lot of the salt, and made the atrocious composition. I am sorry to say that Science responded, this time, and did credit to the memory of Davy and Berzelius. The explosion was all that could be desired. My eyesight was miraculously preserved, but my eyelashes and hair were turned to stubble. They have had time to grow again and again, and fall away at last since then, and what is now left of them is colourless.

But the smell of the polish of the Chemical Cabinet which started this career—O the rashness of that gift of my father's!—is with me still, and the images of its bottles and its test tubes and its small allowances in pill-boxes of such chemicals as had the sense not to be hygrometric; and its stopper-bottles containing horrors, chuckling to themselves over the way they meant to destroy my clothes; and its two scraps of litmus and turmeric test papers which would detect all sorts of things, only you had to be so careful to remember which was which; all these are with me still, and I can

lie here and wonder now what possessed my parents to let me appropriate that celebrated attic where The Man unpacked Pandora's box, and devote it to what Varnish rightly called my messes.

So much did I appropriate it, that it came to be known as The Chemistry Room; and if it were possible for speech to come again from vanished lips, and talk could turn now as it used to turn, some trifle of thirty or forty years since, on what we then fancied was a time-worn memory of the house of my babyhood, I should still refer without a pause to "The Chemistry Room," and never dream the phrase could call for explanation. But my old nurse was the last for whom it held its meaning. They are all gone now, and the last flicker of the old familiar names will soon die down in the one old brain that holds them, and leave to Oblivion an inheritance of darkness.

## CHAPTER X

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

I CAN fix the date of what I am about to disinter from the past; a morning of the year fifty-three, shortly before Christmas, when I was on my way to fourteen years of age. Too old, that is, to leave me room for wonder, now, at sudden vivid flashes, as I write, of memories long forgotten; things not to be recalled at will, but clear as daylight in this haphazard resurrection. But I *did* wonder, mind you, at the like illuminations of my babyhood!

There was a dense fog that morning. The gas, burning throughout the house with a nerveless flame, as though the sudden run upon its resources had overtaxed them, was itself barely visible; and the choked combustion was struggling for life even as the choked lungs of the household were struggling for breath. A universal paralysis reigned over things animate and inanimate. Fires were refusing to burn with the only eloquence at their disposal, the production of smoke, which went reluctantly up the chimney to help the fog without. The urn, discouraged by the introduction of a lukewarm piece of cast iron into its vitals, was yielding tepid water; and yesterday's milk, pathetically submitted in a jug adapted to its volume, was confessing, when I came down to breakfast, at a quarter-to-nine—"eight-forty-five" was unknown in those days—that the milk proper had not yet come, and suggesting that something had happened to its sponsor, a person whose appearance laid claim to rural innocence and seemed to shrink from the vices of Town. At least, I believed that to be the import of an embroidered smock and a peculiar low-crowned hat.

I was due at school at a quarter-past-nine, but not deeply concerned on that account, as there was a general leniency in the air towards demoralization, owing to the near approach of Christmas. So I trifled with my conscience on various pretexts, and postponed the evil hour of departure into the cold. The Governor would like to see me before I went, and he wasn't down yet. Also the clock was five minutes fast. Also old Rameau—the master of my first class, for I started with French in the morning—wouldn't be there till half-past.

On second thoughts the clock was ten minutes fast. I couldn't

swear that my governor hadn't said, "Wait till I come down, you young scaramouch!" from the inner recesses of his dressing-room, though I had only slender grounds for imputing such a speech to him—my ignorance of what he *had* said being the chief one.

On third thoughts that clock was a quarter fast. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered. I couldn't be in time now, anyhow! Just as well be late in earnest, while I was about it!

Varnish, passing kitchenwards, said:—"Your par, he's out of his dressing-room, Master Eustace, and what *he'll* say I don't know. Fancy his finding you not gone, and it getting on for ten o'clock!" Varnish's speech called for knowledge of its why and wherefore, to make it intelligible.

But I refused to accept the official view of my father, within a week of Christmas. My last justification of delay turned on the unimportance of Modern Languages, as against the Classics. French wasn't Latin. Nothing was less important than French; except indeed German; which, like Dancing, was optional. But only some twenty families seemed ever to be in an optative mood about either. Latin was the *plat fort* of the school, in my day, and on that morning my first Latin class was at a quarter-past-ten.

I think the reason of my wish to see my father before diving into the fog was in a great measure that I had overheard dissension between himself and my mother through the cancelled door of my room, the night before. Whenever this happened I always wished to see him complete next day; safe in his groove, and lubricated; qualified, as it were, for further existence. There had been marked asperities in their concert this time; sharp accents on my father's side, on my mother's the loud pedal, frequently. Also, disturbance in the night had crept into my dreams. The amount of friction seemed to have gone beyond ordinary Settlement, or my mother had been ill. Or both.

He was worried, there was no doubt of that. He came straight downstairs and passed me by in the passage, and had rung the dining-room bell before he said to me:—"Hullo!—*you're* a nice character. What are you doing here, this time of day? Go and catch Varnish, and send her to your mother." But Varnish was on her way to the bedroom. So, said my father, *that* was all right! But how about me? "What are you doing here, you profligate youth?" he continued. "Why aren't you at school?"

I began a statement, incorporating contradictory excuses; but he stopped me with, "Good job you're not, perhaps!—make yourself useful"—meaning, maybe I might! "Look here, you immoral



young scamp, just you take this letter—wait till I've written it!—to Dr. Scammony in Bernard Street, and wait for the answer."

"Is mamma ill!" I asked. My father did not reply until he had written a brief note in a hurry, as I have seen letters—long ones—written on the stage. "One or two tablespoonfuls three times a day. That kind of thing. Now trot!"

I believe I said something my father either did not hear, or ignored, reflecting on the medical skill of our family doctor, whose name was not really Scammony, but Hammond. I always treated him with scorn, but without assigned reason. Having expressed my contempt for him, I trotted, as directed, leaving my father feeling round on his face for some solution of the perplexity that was visible on it. He always did that, and never seemed to find it.

I am as sure as I am of anything in this uncertain world, that my father loved my mother dearly, devotedly. *Why* he did so, I never was able to discover. But that he *did* love her, uphill work as it must have been, I have not a shadow of doubt. I am sure that if she had asked him "on her own"—I am told that this expression is Modern English—to pay over any fraction, or the whole, of his stockbroking swag into her settled funds, he would have done it straightway. But the evil genius of a remorseless egotism must needs set her a flaunting the superior wisdom and experience of her brothers in his face, and the fruit of his successful speculations became an Apple of Discord as venomous as the one Ate put into Settlement for the Gods at that feast of Olympus. Hence the dissensions of which the one I overheard that night was a sample, in which a certain combativeness of my father's no doubt was to blame as much as my mother's querulousness—or overbearing, whichever we agree to call it. And I suspect he was brewing an indictment against himself for it when I left him; saying to himself, perhaps, that maybe the delicacy my mother was suspected of was more real than he had hitherto supposed, and that more forbearance on his part would have averted bad consequences this time; that he had lost his temper, in fact, and was to blame.

I think I despised Dr. Scammony because he was bald and small. If he had had more bounce I should have respected him. But he was the meekest little man with, I should say, the meekest little manner within the scope of meekness. When he had read twice through my father's note, he said absently:—"Cardiac symptom. Then I shall call in Jobson." But I don't think he knew I heard, or thought I didn't matter. Then he looked at me regretfully, and shook his head. He played a chord faintly, with open fingers, on each of my lungs, and said:—"Should wrap up!" Then he told

me to run along, my boy, and he would be round in a minute, and I was to tell my father. But I had to go to school, and I said so, and went. My father had given me instructions not to return unless Dr. Scammony was unable to come at once.

I suppose I wasn't reported by the Cerberus I had to pass before I could slip in and mix with the throng of boys swarming from class-room to class-room at the end of the first hour, for I was never called to account for my delinquency. Certainly I told Cerberus in confidence that I had had to go for the doctor for my mater, who was seedy; and that may have influenced him to silence. Anyhow, I never was brought to book. As for my mother's indisposition and Dr. Scammony, I soon forgot all about both, with the renewal of Latin saturation, having for its object, I suppose, the cultivation of a distaste for the Classics.

In these days I never went home to dinner at midday. The usage had come to an end at my special desire. I preferred the Saturnalia of the playground, even when it involved neglect of a so-called dinner, in Room Zed—which I had heaps of money to pay for if I chose—or the satisfaction of hunger with the most unwholesome food I have ever tasted, certain hideous confections retailed in the playground by an enemy of boys' stomachs called "The pieman." I can revive at will the taste of any of it, by imagining its bearer bringing it on a tray, hot from the oven, and placing the tray on a chair near the door that led from the school to the playground, and the rush of purchasers that followed. The penny bun was the safest to eat, peptically. Then came the Scotch bun. Then the three-cornered tart. Then the meat-pie, *princeps obsonium*, judged by its indigestibility. I am glad to say they were all gone, that day in the fog, by the time I got in touch with their vendor. I mention all this to account for my non-return home at midday on this occasion. I often went home by arrangement on rainy days when there was no fun going on in the playground. But not on foggy days, thank you!

For a generous optimism of boyhood in those days recognized, in a dense fog, an awful lark. Boyhood does not recoil from inaccuracy of metaphor. Surely Destiny was amusing herself at my expense, to make that fog so awful a lark. I can remember the enjoyment it afforded to all but a delicate few of some three hundred boys; the splendid consciousness that Authority could not see what was going on a few paces off—a very few paces!—the sense of righteous triumph over abuse of power when the master of one class, who was unpopular, had to throw up the sponge, or choke, in an effort to make himself heard by a swarm of young

miscreants who had no pity for asthma, and no interest in Keightley's *History of England*; the final pæans of exultation as they broke loose from bondage. For the condition of release, that they should go quietly, was not honourably observed, the consciousness of power to disappear into Cimmerian darkness proving too much for the highest morality.

Two stories are told of the effect that any great surprise or shock has on the memory of what has just preceded it. According to some, all vanishes and is forgotten, obliterated by the force of the new incoming record. But others tell another tale, that the very force of its impression has as it were involved the trifles of the hour that preceded it, that else might have been forgotten, and left them stamped, indelible, for ever.

This was my experience of the events of that day. The choking fog, the spiritless gas-jets struggling to assert themselves, the fiction that they were burning in the daylight, the wild Saturnalia of boyhood broken loose, hard to catch and impossible to identify at anything worth the name of distance; embarrassed Authority's pretence of tolerating, on the score of magnanimity, outrages it was powerless to prevent—all these things and the details of them, that might have belonged to a hundred other London fogs, are to me still part and parcel of this one and none other. And as I think over that day, they all come back to me, and I can recognize even now the share each had in the composition of that awful lark, and picture to myself the exuberant reports of its joys in the larger half at least of two hundred homes, whereof mine was not one.

In our school, the boys were not turned out when the classes were over, necessarily. Those especially who lived near at hand used to remain on in the playground to the limit of toleration of the ruling powers. Boys who lived at a distance departed promptly, in their own interests.

My group of companions, a gang of desperadoes who were still glowing with satisfaction at misdeeds committed during the awful lark, were the sons of residents within an easy walk of the school—in Gower Street, Bedford and Russell Square, or further eastward in the Great Coram district. They were not given to going straight back to their families, preferring to see Life in each other's company, as much as possible; and on the present occasion several came out of their way, or beyond their destination, dropping scattered units at their respective homes. I arrived at mine, so accompanied, most immorally late; and my companions, all but Cooky Moss, passed on when we reached the doorstep. Cooky remaining to gather what might be of news, and overtake the others

with it; or break his contract to do so, as should chance. I was immensely relieved to find that a carriage leaving the door of our house in the fog was not a doctor's, but our own peculiar brougham with its imperturbable box-occupant, looking forward unmoved to a drive through the fog to Roehampton, to convey my sister Roberta and Miss Helen Evans to an amateur theatrical performance; in which my sister, who had a dramatic turn, was to take a leading part. They were just starting as I came to the door.

"Hullo!" said I, merely to *entamer* conversation, "What's the matter?"

"Oh, it's the boy," said Roberta. "Mamma's better. Go on, Mapleson . . . I'm really afraid I *am* crushing you, dear." This was to Miss Evans, whose head appeared out of a surging mass of skirt and crinoline, which squeezed up, from close packing, to very near the chins of their wearers. It was as though two balloons had been forced inside the brougham, and some decorative heads and hands had found their way through the silk. Miss Evans replied that she was the less crushable of the two. "Besides," said she, "as if *I* mattered!" She had been grooming herself very carefully, I could see, for all that.

"I say," said I, "are you sure?" I might just as well have waited until I was in the house. But a well-known twist of the mind—well known to the student of human perversity, I mean—must needs make me insist on the completion of my information by its first communicant. When the crossing-sweeper at the corner of the street touches his hat to the gentleman four doors up, and says to him, "Postman's just been to your house, Sir," ten to one that gentleman says to that crossing-sweeper, "Did you see if he had a letter for me?"—at least, he does so if he is a weak character: which one is, broadly speaking. I was, on this occasion, and my sister was too preoccupied with her personal beauty to give much attention to a questioning boy.

"Oh yes—I'm sure," said she, perfunctorily. Then she made corrections. "At least, I'm not sure, I mean—I *am* sure, only I hardly saw her. *You* saw her, Helen! Miss Evans saw her, and said she was all right. . . . Go on, Mapleson!"

"Stop a minute while I tell your brother," said Miss Evans. "Yes,—your mamma was getting on all right, Dr. Hammond said. She'll be asleep now because she's just had her medicine." She added something I did not catch, and my sister responded. "Strong—did you say? Well, we can't help that—do let's be off. . . . How do you know? Did you pour it out for her?"

"No—I didn't pour it out. But I could smell it, for all that." Then my sister pulled up the window, and Mapleson was just going to make a suggestion to the horse, when she dropped it again, to say:—"Tell them if the fog's bad we're sure to stop. . . . I mean, not to expect us." To which I replied, with brotherly indifference, "All serene!" an expression at that time recently introduced into the language, and still occasionally used by old-fashioned people. She said, "Vulgar boy!" and shut the window. They vanished into the fog, and Cooky, who had heard the colloquy, accepted it as containing a satisfactory report, and said good-night, leaving me on the doorstep.

I knocked and rang with confidence, and even some sense of inflation. For had I not been for the doctor in the morning? Was not that a feather in my cap, apart from the mere glory conferred by illness in the house, possibly dangerous? Think of that!

Varnish opened the door and was glad. Her words were:—"You're wanted, Squire! Come in to where your pa's waiting for you." She frequently addressed me as though I rode to hounds and had manorial rights. "Squire" was a common form of speech with her.

My father came out of the dining-room, looking pleased also. "There you are, Master Jackey," said he. "Your Mamma's asked for *you*." Then he said to Varnish:—"She'll be awake by now. Go and see."

"Missis's words was Master Eustace to go up, the minute he came," said Varnish. My father did not contest the point, but said:—"Well—suppose you go up, Jackey. Go up quietly, and if your mother's asleep still, just you go in quietly and sit down. Keep quiet till I come."

"What am I to tell Cooky?" said I.

"Tell Cooky? Bless the boy," said my father, "why tell Cook anything?"

"Naw-awt *Cook!*" said I, prolonging my first word needlessly, not without implied contempt for Cook, an excellent woman. "Cooky Moss. He's waiting outside."

"Oh, that's your game, is it?" said my father. "I see. Why isn't he called Belshazzar or Nebuchadnezzar? Cooky!"

"His Christian name's Monty," said I unconscious that my vocabulary was open to criticism. I was equally unconscious of what there was to be said against my father's random selection of Scripture names for Cooky; chosen *only*, I am sure, by the vaguest biblical association.

"You trot up to your mamma. Go quietly, I'll talk to



Nebuchadnezzar." I heard afterwards of the interview that followed, but the sequel of the moment cancelled other events for the time being.

I did as I was bid, as to quietness, fervently. I took my shoes off on the landing, and opened the door of my mother's bedroom stealthily. I stood by the bed and wondered—would she wake? I was not alarmed, for I only saw in all this mere everyday illness, which would of course give way before a certain number of doctor's visits. That is how youth looks at therapeutics: doses of medicine are mere concurrent formalities, that make the belly bitter, like the Seer's little book, but are not like honey in the mouth. There the metaphor fails, with a vengeance.

One can know of a dense London fog in a closed room, if one watches the fire, by the reluctance of its smoke to rise. Or by listening for the changes of the street sounds without. As the fog deepens, and shakes hands with the darkness of night, the wheels die down and the hoofs of patient horses, accepting fate, are slow and almost silent. Mysterious shouts appear—such shouts as may one day tell us, on this side Styx, of Cimmerians in the gloom beyond. I stood watching the fire and listening to the shouting, thinking what a glorious time the link-boys must be having out there in the dark, and waiting for my mother to speak or move.

It seemed a long time, but one cannot judge time by the ticking of a clock alone. One only knows that it pulsates at its slowest to the waiting ear in the silence. Very possibly I had not stood there over five minutes when I thought the hand that lay on the coverlet, and looked white, was moving, and that my mother had spoken in a whisper. I spoke in reply—said, "Yes," or, "What?" I think.

To my ear, dropped to hear it, the whisper that came sounded like, "Your father." My judgment was cool enough then, but in a moment uneasiness came upon me. There was something wrong, outside my experience. I touched the colourless hand, and it barely moved.

I began to speak, and my voice did not encourage me. I felt it was showing fear lest there should be no answer. "I say," said I, using my invariable exordium, "I say, Mamma. Do you want the Governor?" I listened hard for any sound, my heart beginning to go. I think what set it going was chiefly that the counterpane felt cool. Compared to that, the hand was nothing. Hands *are* cold, if left out of doors. Coverlids are only cold on empty beds.

Hearing nothing in reply to my question, I slipped from the

room as noiselessly as I had come. My father I knew would be in the small parlour, not in his dressing-room. He had been in the house unusually early, having been able to get away from the office, as I suppose, on the plea of illness at home. Subordinates cannot do this sort of thing; *his* standing warranted it. I found him writing a letter, and wished he would look round, to see that something was wrong, rather than that I should have to broach the subject. I found I could not choose words that would alarm cautiously, without saying too much. I do not wonder at this now, for I have been at the same loss, in after years, under the same circumstances.

"I say, Pap!" said I.

"Human Schoolboy," said he, going on writing deliberately, without looking round, "what—do—you——?" He dropped speech abstractedly until he had signed the letter, saying rapidly as he did so, "His very faithfully Nathaniel Pascoe," and was blotting it, when he turned to me with his mind on my business—at my service now, as it were—and said, concretely:—"What do you say, Human Schoolboy?"

I began hesitatingly, "I think Mamma's——" and stopped.

"Wanting to go to sleep again?" said he. "Was she all right?"

"Oh yes, she was all *right*," said I; but, as I suppose, grudgingly. For my father spoke back quickly, "*Quite* all right?" and waited, holding his half-folded letter with his eyes fixed on me.

I hesitated, and at last decided on "I thought she said for you to come." It was lame in structure, but it answered its purpose.

"Something wrong?" said he. "You go and call Varnish, old man. Don't say anything to your sisters." He went straight from the room, and up the stair-flight two steps at a time.

Varnish, whom I had called to below without getting an answer, was already by the bedside when I arrived in the room, having in fact been close at hand throughout my visit. My father said, "Anything wrong, Varnish?" and she replied, "I daresay not." She spoke encouragingly, a thing one should never do.

But alarm was getting possession of them, and it grew. "Get her up—get her up!" said my father. "Get her to sit up!" They raised my mother into a sitting position between them, and I saw that she spoke, and my father heard. For he replied:—"Yes, love, we'll let you go to sleep directly." Then he said:—"Brandy, I think, at once!"

With a boy's sharpness I saw the brandy bottle on the table. "Good boy!" said he. "Pour some out—and about as much water. That's right." The brandy was not spilt, but neither hand

that touched the glass was steady. We did have an accident though, I remember. A medicine bottle fell and broke on the floor, but there was almost nothing in it.

The efforts to get brandy down the patient's throat were—must have been—successful. For she spoke again as soon as she was back on the pillow, so that at least my father heard, and answered. "Well, well then!—you shan't have any more of the detestable stuff." And her hearing must have been active, for when my father said, "not supposing she would hear, "We must have Hammond at once," she moaned and said, "Oh, please no more doctors!" I think my father was relieved at the slight asperity of her tone. It meant revival. No danger there!

I was prompt to suggest that I should fetch Dr. Scammony. But my father would have it that I should lose my way in the fog. He would go himself. But he was over-ruled by Varnish's voice and mine combined. Our opinion was that I should be there in half the time. The Man, Mr. Freeman, was a poor resource, even if he hadn't already departed. He was unable to pass a public house, said Varnish. This *was a disqualification*, in London, for ambassadorship. I ought to go, clearly; but my father would look out at the front door to see me off. The fog might have lifted. He saw me off, seeming to derive confidence from the fact that a poor vobegone street-lamp was visible, about thirty feet distant; all its energies taken up in self-assertion; not a ray left to illuminate beyond its radius. Otherwise, solid fog!

A voice met me in the fog, and a greeting. It had detected me under that lamp. "Stop a bit, little Buttons," it said. "This letter's for your Governor. From my old brother."

My school-fellow Cooky had had time to walk to his own home, to find this letter in want of a bearer, and to run back with it. This would fix our parting at over twenty minutes ago; it cannot have been much more. I considered the letter, looking at it.

"Let's go back and shove it in the letter-box," said I. "I'm going to the doctor's. My mater's worse."

"I'll come too," said Cooky Moss. We went back and dropped the letter in the box; not resorting to violence—that was mere poetry. Then we went off quickly through the fog; too quickly to allow of our usual practice; arm-in-arm, or arms round necks, as might be. We ran, as fast as was safe in the almost impenetrable darkness.

"There's an awful kick-up in the City," said Cooky. "But you don't understand these things, little Buttons."

"Don't I, rather?" said I. "Don't be an ass, Cooky! I suppose that was what your old brother's letter was about?"

"Why of course it was! What did you think it was about? Pickles? Grand Pianos?" This was a selection, without prejudice, from the whole available Universe. "My brother wouldn't write a letter about anything else, unless it was *editio princepses*. That's his hobby. He knows nothing about the insides of books, but he knows about *editio princepses*."

"I say, Cooky! What *was* the letter about though?"

"MacCorquodale, Boethius, and Tripp. I don't *know*, but I expect it was that. They've burst up."

"What's that?"

"That means that you can buy shares in MacCorquodale's for an old song, like so much waste paper."

Now I had kept an eye on my father's transactions, so far as they were public property, in proportion with the growth of my powers of understanding of the machinery of the world. And I was just then acquiring knowledge of the various ways of possessing money, and of the great games of Beggar-my-neighbour and Enrich-myself that are being played at the Royal Exchange, the Bourse, Wall Street, and Monte Carlo. I had come to appreciate my father's *modus operandi*, and to regard him as absolutely infallible. So when Cooky Moss told me this latest news from the City, all the impression it produced on me was a slight sketch on the tablet of my mind of my father buying up MacCorquodale shares at a nominal cost; and selling them again at a fabulous price after a Phœnix resurrection of the extinct Bank. I was happily unconscious of the uncomfortable truth, that my father was a principal shareholder already, and had paid quite enough for his shares; Mr. Boethius had seen to that. My belief to this day is that my father's error of judgment, his faith in this gentleman's hat and seals and spotless linen, was produced when those shares in Mount Bulimy were not snapped up by the latter. If I am right, it was the old Confidence Trick on a large scale, and Mr. Boethius's sagacity was far-sighted.

I thought so little of Cooky's 'Change bulletin that I contented myself with an inquiry about old songs. Why were they vilipended? "They're better than new ones, anyhow," said he; for this young Ebrew Jew was musical. "Palestrina's better than Balfe."

I am recording all this merely because it happened, and I recollect it, sharp and clear, word for word. I remember everything on that day—the dense Stygian veil over the soundless streets, almost too dense to be a Lark any longer; the invisible traffic that came on

a sudden, with a lurid glare of link-boys, from the Unknown, to be reabsorbed by it ten paces off; the man who had just found out he wasn't in Long Acre, and wanted to be directed there; the other who wanted to be directed to Mecklenburg Square, just where we turned out of it. A very red-faced memory of an old gentleman comes out of that fog, points out how disgraceful it is to The Authorities that such a state of things should be permitted to exist, and vanishes into it again.

Then comes my recollection of our catching Dr. Scammony on his own doorstep, trying for entry with gloves too thick to wield a latchkey. He gave up trying on hearing my message. He would go straight to my father's, without going into his own house. But we two young gentlemen must take a message to Oldwinkle and Bousfield the Chemist's, to the effect that that firm's boy had never taken the medicine to Mrs. Fullalove's. That was the whole—no more. We were flattered by the trust placed in us, felt our way to the Apothecary's, and delivered the message conscientiously. "Two prescriptions for Fullalove—liniment and ointment. We shall have to get another boy," was Mr. Oldwinkle's reflection. No doubt, in time, Fullalove got her medicine.

I trust, for the sake of Human Nature, that the remainder of our walk did not show any real indifference on my part as to what was going on at home. I hope it was only my perfect faith in my mother's recovery—for had not the doctor gone post haste to succour her?—that made it possible for me to enjoy that aftermath of the day's awful lark at school. Had Cooky not been overdue at his own house he would have seen me home, and left me in Mecklenburg Square. As it was I saw *him* home, leaving him at his own door in Doughty Street, and through it could hear his mother and his sister Rachel denouncing him for being home late for dinner. For in some houses in those early Victorian days, dinner was at six. How strange that used to seem, forty years later!

Cooky's dinner was at six and he was very late for it—a poor landmark in the realm of Time! How late, is hard to say; for never a clock could we see in the darkness, and his watch had stopped, and I did not possess one. "Waterbury" was unborn in those days; was primeval forest, probably. It may have been two hours since we left my father's house. It may have been more. I have no memory to determine time, closely. I know that I contrived, Heaven knows how, to lose my way in the fog, near home as I was. Once orientation is lost, in a dense fog, all sense of locality goes, and panic takes its place. Then comes the hour



of trial, and one has to decide which contradictory advice he shall accept and which reject. To choose between two advisers absolutely without data, pointing opposite ways, is at least as hard as to choose for oneself without anything to go upon. Three policeman told me I was going the wrong way, and yet I followed the advice of each, with a newborn faith in each, and a newborn doubt of his predecessor. I believe I had been at Charing Cross before I got to Fountain Court in the Temple, where I met my uncle's friend, Mr. Skidney. It was his recognition, not mine.

I can almost laugh now to recall the absurdity of his appearance; of which I was conscious, although I did not at the time assign its cause rightly. I put it down to the fog that Mr. Skidney addressed me ceremoniously, calling me "Sir," and taking off his hat to me. I fancy the image of himself he had in his mind, as he did this, resembled Beau Brummell. He held to a railing as he endeavoured to get the hat on again, but seemed to miss his head, and to impute his failure to some peculiarity in the hat itself, holding it at arm's length, and placing it slowly in various lines of sight, which he seemed unable to focus properly. His speech was fairly clear as to articulation, but so confused and uncertain in structure, that I could only guess at its bearing on the hat. I think he was dwelling on the roguery of the tradesman who sold it to him, and the deterioration of hat-manufacture in modern times. Those made now would not keep steady. Just look at it! He added that he had bought it of a dem Jew.

I resented this, because of Cooky. Besides, I did not like Mr. Skidney, on his merits. He did not improve his position with me by wringing my hand, as soon as he had got his hat insecurely on, and showing that he knew me, calling me Wiggy's nephew. "Wigram Q. C." he added. And it was then I saw he was drunk, from his way of taking aim at these initials, and missing the last. For what he said was "Kewsh," and there an end.

I wanted to get away from him, but he would not leave my hand. "I say," said I, as usual. "I say, *do* let go please, Mr. Skidney. I've got to get home. My mater's ill. . . . I say . . . don't!"

He would persist in holding my hand, and I did not like the feel of his. He then said in one word, "Stop a minute;" and, in about fifty, that there was a very respectable tavern at hand with a private bar, where they would always supply him with a glass of dry Sherry on credit. He said it was "Gold Sherry," but I think he meant "Good Old."

"I *hate* sherry!" I cried, getting rather desperate. "No—I say

—Mr. Skidney—really, I won't, please! I want to get home. Do leave go!" But Mr. Skidney held on, slimily; and, although no doubt I could have broken from him by sheer violence, I felt that would have been unwarranted and outrageous. For was he not my uncle's friend? Up to a much greater age than mine, family friendship of any sort is a hall-mark on its object.

A circle of light, like a vacant Saint's nimbus on the lookout for a tenant, fluttered as a jack o' lantern is said to do by those that have seen one, across two sides of Fountain Court. It ended by encircling the group composed of Mr. Skidney and myself, and then shrank, concurrently with the slow approach of a heavy tread.

The tread came nearer and the nimbus grew smaller. Its glare brought a black wall of darkness close to us—containing, as I supposed, a police-sergeant going his rounds—rested on me for a second, and seemed satisfied; then pinioned Mr. Skidney, who couldn't dodge it.

"It's getting towards time that young master was thinking about bed," said its promoter, apparently to lead up to conversation, there being nothing in the position to call for official intervention, whatever suspicion might be justified. "That your son?"

Mr. Skidney relinquished my hand, and I wasn't sorry to feel the last of him. The appearance he had, of a sort of woebegone claim to dignity or gentility of some sort was inexpressibly funny, as he replied, rather more thickly than before:—"Boyshawlright. French. Shun. Not famlimanself, offshire."

The officer's reply should trace the meaning of this through the ultra-phonetic spelling it amuses me to assign to it. "If he's your friend's son he'd best be thinking about going to bed, Mister." He seemed to regard this as his strong platform in the conversation, and not one to be lightly relinquished. I think though he was taking an unfair advantage of the extinction of the Hours by the fog, to billet me as sleepripe in that way. But he was healthy and strong and broad, and his voice was big, with an implication that it could be double the size if called on, and the steam from his lungs in the frost-bound air brought thoughts of a horse to my mind. His strong jaw, and cheekbone too for that matter, were blue, stamping him as distinctly a man without a huge black beard—one that had been shaved off him lately, and meant to be again. His immensity and repose of manner were so much fresh air after Mr. Skidney. But that gentleman, though he might have been at a loss to say why, had an inner conviction that he *was* one, and could patronize common men from a social standpoint.

The Alcohol Fiend was scoring points against Mr. Skidney. He collapsed against the railings, giving the impression that the impact of the light had just made the difference, it having been touch-and-go with him. But he could muster enough dignity to wave the hand of condescension, saying benevolently:—"G'night, offsher!"

The officer illuminated the contemptible sum-total of imbecility and whiskey for a moment, and then said to it, "You've not had enough yet," meaning that a glass more would bring it to maturity, and qualify it for the station-house. Then he added, to me:—"Where was it you said *you* wanted?" For him, this fog had changed the whole world into home-seekers, baffled.

"Mecklenburg Square," said I. "It's in behind the Foundling Hospital and that's in Guildford Street. And Guildford Street's out of Russell Square——" I became aware that I was doing what my father called "teaching my granny," and stopped suddenly.

"Ah!" said the officer, sedately. "I've been in those parts. I'll put you on your road. And don't you speak to nobody, only one of our men." He accompanied me as far as Chancery Lane, put me on it as a road to be relied on as far as Holborn, where it would cease to be valid, and I should have to use my wits. They were hardly wanted, as some rain began to sneak down from Heaven; and the fog's heart was broken by the time I had a big crossing to negotiate.

Why do I tell so much the story has no need of? Why do I omit what stories need?—as, for instance, what my father was like. I am almost sure I have said nothing of it. Clearly enough, because what I write is not needed itself, as a story. It is a record written for its writer's sake and no sake else. Do I, the only person concerned, not know well enough what my father was like? Or rather, is he not an identity, more than an image? But gleams of a moment in the past are images, and I have had the image of that policeman in my mind for sixty odd years, and it is still a fresh and noble one; almost cruel in its contrast to that of the wretched drunkard, which is still vivid too, trying to manage without the railings, but not able to do that, and wave a dignified farewell at the same time. I am glad I did not accept that glass of good old sherry, at that respectable tavern. Whether my friend with the bull's-eye went back and found Mr. Skidney mellowed, and qualified for lock and key, I cannot say. We parted the best of friends and never met again. I went as quick as my legs could carry me to Mecklenburg Square.

The present is at odds with the past, either denouncing the other as a dream, when I reflect that I, the old man that passes day after day, night after night in the Workhouse Infirmary, longing that each doctor's visit may bring some clear hint of an end of it all approaching, now within a very measurable distance, I—even I—strange as it is to tell, *am* that boy that stood scared and wondering, near sixty years ago, at the door he had left two hours before; scared at the sound of the voices within; wondering why none should hear his knock, repeated twice, thrice; why footsteps should pass down and up, in seeming panic, so close that he could have made the passers hear by calling aloud, but stood irresolute to do so. I *am* that boy, and the growing panic of that moment is on me still, and the gloom.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE STORY

ON that foggy morning of the Old Man's Youth, Miss Evans the governess sat by herself in the schoolroom in Mecklenburg Square. Her duties were now somewhat of a perfunctory order as regarded her two elder pupils, Ellen and Roberta, Gracey the younger one was still under her tutelage; but Mrs. Pascoe's attack of illness that morning had disturbed the ordinary routine of the household, and Miss Evans sat idly warming her feet at the fire with her thoughts travelling back to the days when she had been a small girl at a large fashionable school kept by a distant relative, who had undertaken to give her her education and train her for a career as a governess, free of charge, her parents having both died leaving her and her two sisters practically penniless, and dependent on the charity of not very near or very wealthy relations.

At that time Miss Cæcilia Wigram one of the older pupils at the school had been sent there in order that she might receive a finish to her education prior to her being launched into society, she was therefore some six or seven years older than the beautiful little Helen, who, in spite of her fascinating appearance, was snubbed and patronized by the big daughters of prosperous homes, more especially by Cæcilia Wigram who with the unthinking cruelty of youth roused a fierceness of resentment in the breast of the little orphan, that she never for one moment suspected or intended.

Time wore on, the days of childish things passed, and Cæcilia Wigram became Mrs. Pascoe, and in due course the mother of daughters who in their turn required tuition, and Mrs. Pascoe began to think herself of the little girl who had been training for a governess in her own schooldays, looked her up and engaged her, all unconscious that the flavour of benevolence with which she coloured the transaction, was fanning the flames of an unreasoning bitterness and resentment hidden deep down under Helen Evans' placid exterior.

The fog deepened, and Miss Evans lit the gas. As she did so she caught sight of her own reflection in the mirror over the



mantelpiece. Yes, she was lovely! there was no mistake about that, yet of what avail were all those good looks if she were never to rise above this wretched down-trodden existence! It was maddening!

Tonight she was going with Roberta the second girl with whom she had struck up a great friendship, to some private theatricals. Roberta was very fond of acting and Miss Evans was to chaperon her and help with the dressing up. Yes, always in the background! Never a real life of her own with the admiration she felt to be her due. She was now turned thirty and the precious years were slipping by! and envy, hatred, malice, desperation, fought together in her dark small mind as the yellow fog grew denser and denser on that dreary December morning. The doctor had been and had prescribed for Mrs. Pascoe. The symptoms, he said, though undoubtedly serious, were not alarming. She must be kept very quiet and he had ordered a soothing draught to be taken should there be any recurrence of the pain. It was mostly nervous, and the nerves must be quieted to avoid any undue strain on the heart.

The day wore on and Roberta proceeded to don her fancy dress much to the satisfaction of Varnish, who suggested that before starting she should show herself to her "mar" who was awake now and seemed to be much better, so Varnish thought.

Accordingly before setting off Roberta went to display her finery to her mother. "Yes, I am certainly better," said Mrs. Pascoe in answer to her daughter's inquiries. "That dress is very pretty," she continued, "but is it safe for you to go all the way to Roehampton in a fog like this?" My dear, just think if you get lost! They can hardly expect you such a dreadful night."

"The fog is lifting, Mamma, and the carriage is there, I am sure it will be all right," said Roberta in a great hurry to be off.

"It strikes me as still very thick in the room," said Mrs. Pascoe, uneasily. "Well, I must just speak to Miss Evans for a moment before you start; tell her to look in on her way down."

Roberta kissed her mother and hurried off, calling to Miss Evans that her mother wished to speak to her but not to stop long as the carriage was waiting.

Mrs. Pascoe lay in bed propped up by pillows, a shaded lamp shed a dim subdued light through the room. The fire flickered dully in the grate, and on the table at a little distance from the bedside stood a glass and a ribbed blue medicine bottle labelled "Poison."

"I wanted to see you, Helen," said Mrs. Pascoe, as the governess came into the room, "to say that if you find you are driving into

a dense wall of fog, you must exercise your authority and insist upon turning back. Roberta is always so headstrong about anything she has set her mind on, but remember my express orders are that you are not to give way to her, you are to turn back."

"I will do my best, Mrs. Pascoe," replied Miss Evans, sullenly. "but Roberta is bent on going, and after all the fog has lifted considerably."

"Well, I am not up to arguing about it," says Mrs. Pascoe, peevishly. "I look to you to see that my orders are obeyed. Is Varnish there?"

"No; shall I call her?"

"Oh, never mind about calling Varnish, you can just give me my medicine before you go; I had better take it now as all this has made my heart flutter."

"All what?"

"Oh dear, why cannot I ever be obeyed without a discussion, it is so fatal to me."

"No one is discussing anything. Is this the medicine?" And Miss Evans held up the bottle to the lamp.

"Yes, that blue bottle, the dose is marked on it."

Miss Evans took the glass in one hand, and the bottle in the other, but the hand that held the bottle shook and an ugly gleam flashed in her beautiful eyes.

"Are you sure that is the right dose?" inquires the invalid as Miss Evans hands her the glass.

"Perhaps I have not given you enough," and Miss Evans' voice sounds strange. "I went by the markings on the bottle only, this lamp gives such a bad light."

Mrs. Pascoe swallowed the medicine, remarking:—"I am sure there was enough, it seemed to me a bigger dose than last time."

"I followed the directions on the bottle, Mrs. Pascoe; is there anything more I can do for you before I go?"

"Nothing, thank you, I shall rest now."

"Good-night," said Miss Evans. "I hope you will sleep well." and she left the room to rejoin Roberta.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE STORY

THE fog did lift, and Roberta and Miss Evans reached their destination without any adventures by the way. The theatricals were voted a great success by the actors and actresses who thoroughly enjoyed their own performance. The audience was a small one owing to the bad weather, but they endured their martyrdom with amiable resignation, and all went merry as a marriage bell.

Meanwhile tragedy grim and fateful, was being enacted in Mecklenburg Square. Dr. Hammond and his assistant, hastily summoned to Mrs. Pascoe's bedside, were fighting the King of Terrors with all the means in their power. "But who gave her the dose?" inquired the doctor. Varnish had left her to help Roberta to dress for the private theatricals, she was much better then, and Roberta had paid her mother a visit before leaving for Roehampton. The medicine was not due to be given for another hour or more, and then only in the event of a recurrence of the pain. "Mrs. Pascoe had a hand-bell placed well within her reach to ring for me if she wanted anything," said the distracted Varnish. "I was only in the room the other side of the passage; I must have heard her had she rung."

In the sudden alarm of finding his wife in a comatose condition when summoned by Eustace John, Mr. Pascoe had overturned the small invalid table near the bed and the medicine bottle which stood on it was broken in falling on the floor, so that it was impossible to say how much she had taken, but as no smell or trace of laudanum could be found on the carpet presumably the bottle contained none, and the patient must have emptied the whole contents of the bottle into the glass under the impression it was one dose. She was all but past speech when her son went in to see her, on his return from school, and since the arrival of the doctors the most violent attempts at rousing her, combined with the use of the stomach pump, had only succeeded in eliciting a faint whispered protest. "Oh, this is cruel, let me be, let me be. I want to sleep."

Far on into the night they made her pace the room. They banged the dinner-gong in her ears. They beat her across the shoulders.

poured the strongest black coffee down her throat, but all to no avail. Long before the first faint streak of the chilly winter dawn appeared over the housetops, the Thing that had been Cæcilia Pascoe to the world in which she lived lay cold and lifeless on the bed, the baffled doctors had left the house, and the bereaved family had retired to get such rest as physical exhaustion can sometimes bring to a barely realized grief and wornout nerves.

Soon after four o'clock in the morning Roberta and Miss Evans drove up to the silent house and let themselves in with the latch-key conceded to them for the occasion. The hall lamp had been left burning and bedroom candles were placed ready for them on the hall table; everything looked as usual, and they came in so noiselessly that no member of that tired out overwrought household heard them arrive. Miss Evans seemed specially anxious to steal upstairs as quietly as possible. As they passed the door of Mrs. Pascoe's room she paused for a second to listen. No sound was audible. All was still as death, and Roberta who was going on in front turned round in time to catch a glimpse of the scared white face of her friend as she hurried on after her to their joint sleeping apartment on the floor above.

"What's the matter, Helen? You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"Nothing's the matter. I am very tired; we are so late," replied Miss Evans, "do make haste and get to bed."

"I suppose Mamma is a lot better," remarked Roberta, "or some one would have been sitting up with her, and there was no light under the door; I looked specially to see."

"Of course she's better," says Miss Evans, irritably. "Why, she seemed fairly well yesterday evening, didn't you say?"

"Well, but you saw her last, Helen; didn't you think she was going on all right?"

"How can you say I saw her," snapped Miss Evans. "Why, I only just put my head in at the door, and that lamp gives no light."

"Oh dear, how cross you are," yawned Roberta, "do get to bed and put the light out, I can hardly keep my eyes open."

Roberta tumbled into bed and almost before her head touched the pillow she had sunk into the deep sound sleep of tired untroubled youth.

Not so Miss Evans; she could not rest, her ears were ever on the alert to detect the slightest sound. At one time she fancied she heard footsteps in the room below. Some one seemed to be pacing up and down, then, what was that? a moan, then silence.

Of course everything was all right! She must forget that incident of the medicine! think of it as a dream, and in course of time it would become one. In any case if the dose had done its worst there was no proof against her! There could be none! She was safe! quite safe! She had better get to sleep. But she did not blow the light out, she left it to flicker and die down, and when the darkness came she lay and trembled longing for the dawn, but she could not sleep.

A cart came slowly rumbling through the Square. Then more sound of wheels, then she heard the milk man deposit his can at the door, but still no one stirred in the house! Yet it must be getting late! What did it all mean? Miss Evans got out of bed and cautiously opened the shutters of the window on her side of the room and drew up the blind. Roberta was still sound asleep, but it was broad daylight now, and she saw the postman going his round on the opposite side of the Square, a few chilly looking pedestrians were hurrying along as if they feared they were late for business, but still not a sound in the house! At last a slight tap came at the door. The hot water, thought Miss Evans as she called "Come in." But it was not the hot water, it was Varnish who opened the door and closing it gently behind her, walked straight up to the window and drew down the blind, ignoring Miss Evans' alarmed inquiry as to the reason of this unusual proceeding. Roberta woke with a start, and Varnish who had crossed the room to her bedside, leant over her with her white drawn face.

"Varnish, what is it? What has happened? Oh, why do you look at me like that?"

"It's your mar, my poor dear lamb! Your dear mar! She's gone!"

And before many moments had passed, Roberta was sobbing her heart out in her old nurse's arms, and her half stunned and dazed youth had made acquaintance with grief and learnt the bitterness of parting.



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE STORY

OF the days that followed, the days of drawn blinds and newly ordered mourning garments, of crape and misery, of hushed voices and tearful faces, there is little to tell.

Mrs. Pascoe had died of an overdose of laudanum; she had taken it herself, there was no other possible explanation. Instead of ringing for Varnish or one of the servants she had poured out the fateful dose with her own hands mistaking the quantity. Her brothers, however, never very amiably disposed to their brother-in-law, openly accused him of neglecting their sister and added to the general unhappiness by refusing to attend the funeral.

Poor Mr. Pascoe utterly worn out and miserable was sitting alone in the library on the evening of the day when the last rites had been performed and *finis* written large over his twenty years of married life. His thoughts travelled back to the day when he had brought his happy bride of nineteen home to this very house. How well he remembered it all now! All she said and did. How delighted she had been with the house and its possibilities, and how the transformed schoolgirl had played at being the dignified married woman, and oh, how happy they were together. Then how the years had passed and the children come, and how the glamour of those early days had gradually faded into prosaic everyday life, with a growing complaint of constant ill-health on his wife's part that he reproached himself now with never having taken seriously enough. Perhaps had he been more gentle and patient with Cæilia who knows but that all this terrible tragedy might never have happened! Yes, his mind was quite made up, he would write that letter at once! He would do it now, now that it was all too late! He would follow out her last and often reiterated wish, and send in his resignation to Somerset House! By doing so he would forfeit his right to a pension in the future, and lose his employment in the present. But had he any real need of either? All he touched had turned to money, and he was a rich man! As for employing his time there would, could be, no difficulty about that! so without giving it another moment's consideration, Mr. Pascoe sat down at his writing table and wrote the letter that was to sever his connection with Somerset House for ever.

An hour or so later his old friend Mr. Stowe looking in to inquire how it fared with him, found him sitting sadly before the fire with his schoolboy son on his knee, and was duly informed of the decisive step he had just taken.

"You see it was her last wish, Stowe, and it is some sort of consolation to me to carry it out."

His friend stared at him as if he thought he must have taken leave of his senses.

"Yes! of course I quite understand your feeling, but under the circumstances, Pascoe, it would be madness! Sheer madness to throw up your post! Think of your family, you have no right to run such a risk, at least wait and see."

"What circumstances and why should I wait? What do you mean? I can't see where the madness comes in?" And Mr. Pascoe looked completely bewildered.

"Why, how can you risk giving up a salaried employment now, Pascoe? You can't tell yet awhile if anything at all will be saved out of the smash. You don't know yet how you may be situated!"

"But what smash?" inquired Mr. Pascoe. "I know of none."

"Why, the big smash in the City, of course. MacCorquodale's Bank, your bank has burst up, is suspended, the money is gone! Why, the papers are full of it!"

"I have not looked at a paper since all this trouble," said Mr. Pascoe, glancing at the pile of unopened *Times* that had accumulated on his table. "But Moss would never have left me to hear of it first from the newspaper, he would have been certain to write. Absolutely certain!"

Then it was that Eustace John raising his head suddenly from his father's shoulder where he had been resting half asleep, worn out by the emotions of the long trying day, remembered about the letter that Cooky had brought for his father the night he went for the doctor. He, Cooky, had said there was a smash in the City and that that letter was from his big brother to tell about it, and they had put it in the letter box and rung the bell without waiting for any one to come. On his return he had asked about it, and Gracey had told him that she had seen the letter in the box with "Immediate" on it and had taken it straight up to the library, and not finding her father there had laid it on his writing table in the most conspicuous place she could think of, after which all recollection of the letter had been banished from both their minds by that night of misery and death. There it lay exactly where she had placed it, but hidden by the stack of un-read newspapers that an unobservant servant had heaped on the top of it.

Mr. Pascoe read the letter now, and from it he learnt of the great crash in the City that would in all probability rob him of the whole of the fortune the Heliconides had brought him, and make it imperative that no such step as retiring from Somerset House should be taken. His future would have to be remodelled, but on far different lines to those he had been contemplating an hour ago. He ought to remain in harness, there could be no doubt about that! All the same he decided to send the letter he had written containing his resignation, and strange to say found a certain relief in contemplating the changed aspect and uncertainty of his monetary outlook in the future.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

My father had been in the house half-an-hour when I arrived, and the fact that he was looking just like himself had impressed Varnish, who came to meet me at the door, very favourably. She evidently thought that the identity of one who goes to the City and meets news of his insolvency might suffer in the process. He had not said anything, but it was known when he went away in the morning that he was going first to the City, and later to Somerset House to resume his ordinary routine work. I found that my sisters shared Varnish's impressions, and in fact that a sort of provisional optimism prevailed in the household—a kind of jury-mast to the ship of Hope, to keep her under way till she could sight port, or meet a tug-boat. There must have been a thread of mis-giving in the sailcloth, for I caught a hysterical undertone in my sisters' hopefulness, when I came to hear their confirmations of Varnish.

I considered that, as my father had taken me so far into his confidence the evening before, I might presume to apply to him for first-hand information. I had my doubts about my claims to it, but no harm could come of asking.

I knocked at his door, and in answer to, "Who's that?" replied, "It's me." To which the answer was:—"Then *me* had better come in, and not hold the door open. Come in, Scaramouch!" By the time I was in I had forgotten the form in which I had arranged my catechism, and it worked out crudely as:—"I say, Pater, what was up?" I daresay this was really more to the point.

Anyway, information was forthcoming. My father repeated, "What was *up*! What next?" as much as to say, "This it is to have a promising son, and this is modern education." But he continued:—"I suppose we mean—what was up in the City? Well, what was *not* up was shares in a certain Bank, which has burst up nevertheless. So I suppose the Bank itself is up though the shares are down."

I believe I was impressed, although I showed it in a strange way, saying merely, "Hookey!" after a moment of appalled silence. My father said, "And then one's offspring says 'Hookey!' as one compelled to accept a new and outlandish expression under protest.

Well," he added, a serious sadness showing itself through his half-joking tone. "Poverty is an evil—but we must hope. At any rate we shall always have a roof over our heads. And"—still more sadly—"your mamma will know nothing about it." It was this speech of my father that made me first alive to the gravity of the position. I doubt, however, if at that time I ever grasped it fully.

These were the days of the unprotected shareholder, before the passing of Limited Liability into law. It is hard now, almost, to believe that at one time the whole brunt of the collapse of a joint-stock undertaking might fall upon a solitary individual; in-somuch that every shareholder made himself liable for the whole of its debts, if his fellows all proved insolvent on winding up. I believe I am not overstating the case in theory, though I do not know whether such a thing ever actually happened in practice as the liquidation of a bankruptcy out of the pockets of one shareholder, all the others making their escape through the Bankruptcy Court. I can remember vaguely how a change in the law some years later was followed by a storm of reckless speculation as soon as investors knew that their liability went no further than their paid-up contributions. I never mastered the whole subject, and it may be I am now writing this to gauge my understanding of it. Indeed, what other object can I have? I do, however, know this much, that the insolvency of MacCorquodale, Boethius, and Tripp left my father, who had bought up most of the shares, with practically nothing but my mother's settlement money to live upon, except of course his own earnings after the affair was wound up. I cannot even feel sure that his year's salary, much of which was actually earned after the Bank suspended payment, was not impounded for the benefit of the depositors. To the best of my recollection it came out that Mr. Boethius had quietly parted with all his own holding—was in fact no longer a shareholder, though he continued in the position of a salaried manager, at a lucrative salary. His great business abilities could not be dispensed with. Perhaps he took alarm at his partner, Mr. Tripp's, reckless gambling on the turf, and indeed at Monte Carlo and elsewhere. Anyhow, he continued a monument of Solvency. Mr. Tripp disappeared, I believe, having provided a resource for his family in the shape of diamonds for his wife, on which the hungry eyes of defrauded creditors were fixed in vain. But I am really not able—so this attempt shows me—to fill out the particulars of this great failure. I only know how ruinous its effects were, and how my father's opulence was changed by it to what was relatively poverty.



I think the milliner's bill for all that mourning, seeking a cash settlement on delivery, was the first awakening we—and perhaps my father himself—had to the full seriousness of the position. I can well remember my sister Ellen applying to him for the amount, and his saying, “Oh—yes—how much is it?” and automatically, from old habit, taking out his usual MacCorquodale cheque-book, and almost beginning to write in it. Then of his abruptly stopping with the exclamation:—“No use now!—No use at all!” I understand, but Ellen, who was not very clever, said, “Why, papa dear, have you no money at the Bank?” before she saw what was wrong. My father leaned his head a moment on his hand; then said, with more heartbreak than I had heard in his voice before:—“I shall have to use your mamma's book.” She had had a separate account with another bank, but he had signed for her by arrangement for some time past, as a matter of convenience. This was probably the first time he had drawn on it for a debt properly his own. I am far from certain that he had, as it was, any legal right to do so. But I can only give the facts as I recollect them. I cannot vouch for anything but crude memories, fifty years old.

I fancy he would have had to borrow for current expenses had it not been for this fund, which would not have been available but for the double signature. Even as it was, I have a recollection that my uncles, acting as my mother's trustees in the course of what my father called the *settlementeering* which followed, endeavoured to compel him to pay back this amount into the settlement fund. My father replied to them, perfectly correctly as I believe, that my mother's pocket money belonged to herself, not to her trustees. But Uncle Francis may have been legally right.

If it had not been for the peculiar attitude of my uncles and their mother about my father's management of my mother's case—which might have been connected with a blood-feud, so demonstrative did they become over it—the *settlementeering* might not have assumed so vicious a form as it did later. Where there is goodwill among all the parties to a settlement, their affairs may be managed almost as well as though no settlement had ever been made; but where trustees utilize it as a means towards the laceration of co-trustees or *cestui-qui-trusts*—and we are all human, and not to be trusted with power—*settlementeering* ensues. I hope that I am not uncharitable in the belief that my Highbury relations—for I include the old lady—turned my father out of his house to avenge his imputed neglect of my mother. In any case they might have deferred the decision of the matter until it was known what

my father's income was going to be, instead of hurrying on to outstrip the accountants who were getting the affairs of the Bank tidy, to make a good show when the final winding-up came. As it was my Uncle Francis contrived to get a very high bid for the unexpired lease of the house within two months of my mother's death, and he engineered this offer and his responsibility to the Lord Chancellor in such a way that my father's sensitive conscience forced him to assent to an arrangement that his reason mistrusted. Moreover, he had little choice, for my uncle "pointed out" to him that though he was treating the house as his own, it was in no sense his property, but that of the trustees, who were entitled to keep it or sell it, for the benefit for its inmates of course, just as much as consols: standing in their name. As for whether he remained on as tenant, that would "rest with the purchaser." This came by letter, for my uncle had refused to meet my father "for the present."

My father, I believe, wrote back to the effect that if the trustees provided a cheaper substitute for the house, all costs of removal considered, their position would be a justifiable one. He doubted—he said—whether the Lord Chancellor would at all approve of the arrangement without such a condition attached. He knew that dignitary formerly at Cambridge, and had always accounted him of sound mind. But of course his Chancellorship had since then had a legal education. My uncle's countercheck quarrelsome to this was that if my father "desired an official application to the Chancellorship" he would "promote it to the best of his ability." But he "had to remind" my father, that the offer for the lease would only hold good for a limited period; terminating, as it did, next Easter, namely, "the 27th prox"; I remember this, because I rejoiced so at the Easter holidays coming so early. We were then near the end of February.

If my Uncle Francis had not, maliciously as I think, precipitated this disposal of the Mecklenburg Square lease, it is more than possible that the house would have remained in my father's possession. The final settlement of his affairs, a twelvemonth later, would have warranted his offering my mother's trustees an equivalent for what the sale brought, although he might have had to let part of the house to cover it. He was, however, at the time of the sale, under the belief that he had renounced his salary as a Government employee, and indeed this seemed warranted, for had he not written his resignation and received a formal acknowledgment of it? What better evidence could he have?

Nevertheless Somerset House did not lose his services, nor he

its salary, for a long time after. My only clue to the why and wherefore of this, at the time, was a conversation I overheard between him and an official colleague who came one evening, and talked with him long and earnestly, dissuading him from his resignation, which, as it appeared, had not been accepted with avidity; had in fact been pigeon-holed, and had not resulted, so far, in the appointment of a substitute. I overheard it because when this gentleman—who was a Sir, and whose name was Brangwyn or Brathwayt—glanced at me as I sat reading, deeply engrossed in the last number of *Bleak House*, my father said, “Never mind the boy—if *you* don’t?” and he replied, “*I* don’t.” So the boy remained, and what he has become remembers fragments of the conversation, as thus:

“Your friend’s eyes are very queer—why doesn’t he have them seen to? It’s a surgeon’s job. What did you say was his name?”

“I called him Scritchey just now. He always calls me Strap. But his real name is Stowe. Alfred Stowe. We were boys at school together. He made money coffee-planting in Ceylon. He’s a partner in Stacpoole’s now, the picture-auction people.”

“Well, he was very much concerned about you. Came straight to me after you told him why——”

“Yes, I know——”

“—why you were doing it, and said he was certain you were not yourself, and that it would be most unfair to accept your resignation.”

“I was myself.”

“Perhaps, but how was I to know it? I said, it didn’t lie with me to accept or reject, but that I wished it did, because I for one should miss you at the Office.”

“Thank you, Sir Jim,” said my father and shook hands with the gentleman, who continued:

“Mr. Stowe was very earnest that I should keep back your letter as long as possible, and communicate with you again as late as possible, before passing it on to Dalrymple. I saw that he was reasonable, and have done so. Now, the question is——”

“The question is—do I adhere to my decision? The answer is—Yes, I do!”

“My dear Mr. Pascoe, do let me appeal to you. I respect your motive, Heaven knows, and can appreciate it. But will not your promise to——”

“—My wife?——”

“—be fulfilled just the same if you throw up the place this time

next year? Come now, be reasonable! Come to the Office for another twelvemonth!"

"Six months!"

"Well—make it a compromise! Go on to the end of the year. . . . All right?—very well then, let it go at that! . . . Oh no!—I'm not fancying you'll change your mind. Nothing of the sort!" And then Sir James whatever-he-was changed the subject, and presently departed.

I can understand from this conversation exactly how my father's connection with the Inland Revenue remained unchanged until the Christmas following. Why he did, after all, change his mind, and remain in office indefinitely; I did not know until long years after. I shall have to record it in its proper place, if I carry out my scheme of writing all I can recollect, to be read by my Self alone. So I need not write any more about it here.

At this point my memory furnishes me with something to dwell upon with pleasure—my first experience of the joys of house-hunting. My uncle and the new lessee of our old house had this much grace of courtesy in them left—that is Tennyson, I think—that they left us in possession till Michaelmas. But it was no use searching for a new domicile till my father had a more definite idea what his resources were going to be. He was convinced before midsummer that they were going to be so restricted that sixty pounds a year would be our maximum figure for rent. This was a very different thing though, in those days, from what it is now. London rent has doubled, or nearly, since the early fifties.

House-hunting is like opium eating, or dram drinking. It begins so very modestly, and takes possession of its victim so insidiously. The sportsman who starts in the morning hoping to bring down an eligible sparrow at most, comes back in the evening having spent his ammunition on impracticable elephants. He dutifully examines one or two shanties well within his means, goes through a form of counting the bedrooms and measuring the sitting-rooms, and makes a legal entry—almost—of the landlord's name and address on a clean page in his notebook. Then he goes his ways and forgets them heartlessly, in favour of one very nearly the same shape, that recommends itself less offensively to the sanitary nose. These too he discards as the poison enters into his system, and he loses sight of his rent-limitations in view of an abstract truth that there is no harm in seeing any particular empty house; therefore let him have a look at it while he's there! The first shanties are merely the slow introduction to a symphony—those very deliberate notes far apart that almost seem an insult



to the crude musical understanding that does not know what a magnificent chaos of harmonies and discords they portend as soon as the composer's concessions allow their executants to get the steam up. The really brilliant movement begins—on the house-hunter's side of the metaphor—when he first flings rent to the winds, and admits the poisonous idea that you must look at a thing of this sort all round. The meaning of this is not apparent on the surface to Inexperience; those who know will at once associate it with schemes for taking a house twice as large as you want, and letting half of it at the full rent, so that the whole affair will "stand you in" just merely the rates and taxes and repairs. But to enjoy a castle-in-the-air of this sort to the full needs an enlarged mind, a mind saturated with premises; each example, or set, or congeries—which ought it to be?—at least half as large again as its predecessor. Then you can look at it all round.

I was not privileged to share in all the delights of the many inspections of tenements suited for our occupation in every respect but one. I did not see the villa at St. John's Wood whose garden would have paid for itself, nor the fourteen-roomed house at Kensington whose rent was so ridiculously moderate, till it was convicted of being merely the ground rent by a revelation that the premium was fifteen hundred pounds, vouched for as a low one by an agent my father was weak enough to interview. Nor the cottage that really might have been built for us, near Hampstead; only the builder had chosen the wrong side of Hampstead, and it turned out that his idea of proximity was two miles. It was nearer Hendon, and he seemed to consider it a mere matter of sentiment which of the two you said. "'Ampstead and 'Endon," said he, "are not so far apart in themselves, if you come to that." Neither suburb was in a position to throw stones, according to him. Still, it was a pity it was so far from my school, and from Somerset House. For my father continued to quote Somerset House as a factor in the problem; and I, ascribing this to a mere readiness to use it as an engine in argument against my sisters—who did not know what I did of that resignation business—appreciated what I thought was his anxiety that I should not be spirited away to a place full two hours' journey from my school. Indeed, this was what stood for some time between us and his final decision about the house near here that we finally came to occupy.

It was of course my school that prevented my sharing in the pleasures of the chase to the full—that is to say, house-hunting. But on half-holidays I developed into a perfect Nimrod. I infected



Cooky Moss with my enthusiasm; and our excursions every Wednesday and Saturday afternoon must have covered on an average twenty miles of roadway in London and the suburbs every week.

It was after such an excursion that he and I, having exhausted Wimbledon Common and Putney as residential neighbourhoods, found ourselves walking back along the King's Road, Chelsea, on a glorious summer evening. In those days you could walk from Putney to Chelsea through fields all the way, by keeping off the road a little. Putney still was, and Chelsea was almost, in the country. I can recall now how we rested at Eelbrook Common, and what the hay smelt like. If I had not given up—see *supra et passim*—that problem, my Self, I might try to make out why it is that I can lie here and think of my mother's death, almost of any death, quite calmly; but as I remember the smell of that hay, in those fields that evening, I feel as though my heart would bear no more—would break outright and give me my release. So much the better, granting bona fide Death—no shuffles about Immortality? Misgivings creep into my mind, as into the Prince of Denmark's.

I must needs feel the same as I write the rest. It is all very vivid to me, by some chance. Again as I think it through, Cooky jumps to his feet exclaiming, "This won't do, young feller. Six o'clock! *Legs!*" which was a brief exhortation to walk. I can even note that in following his lead I am caught by a briar, and have to disengage it with care from my trousers before I can start to catch him up. Then we got under way in fine pedestrian style, and do not pause until we have got well past Cremorne, of which we took no notice, as indeed we knew nothing about it, nor for that matter of anything else in the neighbourhood.

Just beyond the kink of the road, that must have been caused by some antediluvian pond, Cooky was brought up short by a "to-let" notice over a gateway on the left. It announced the existence of an eligible bijou residence with a quarter-of-an-acre of garden and a coach-house.

"Look at it, or not?" said Cooky, who always treated me with great decision, to correct a corresponding defect in my character. "Say which!"

"Dinner!" said I. I left the word by itself, and went on:—"But we could just walk down and look at it."

"Bother dinner," said my friend. "Let's go down the lane and see what's to be seen."

The lane was lined with trees on either side, elm and chestnut, and was entered through a swing-gate as a private carriage-way,

shared by two or three residences at the end. The gravel pathway made a circle between them, round some larger older elms, to make turning room for things on wheels. At the end on the left, unseen at first, was a garden open to the roadway, except for chains on posts, that hardly counted, and its owner certainly deserved the rich crop of peas that were helping the universal scent of hay in the kitchen-garden behind, if only for having planted the standard roses on the smooth bit of lawn in front. However, it was not our business, any more than the house on the right or its large garden in the rear, or the meadow beyond the fence at the end, or the two fallow deer—actually fallow deer!—that were browsing in it. Beyond it were big trees in some private park or garden.

“I say, Cooky,” said I, “this is just exactly the sort of place for us.” I had hardly yet set eyes on the house itself—barely glanced at it.

“We had better have a look at the diggings themselves first,” said Cooky, bent on sobriety and reason. So we went and stood at the gate of the eligible *bijou* residence, and looked. “I suppose we may go inside if the gate’s open,” said he. We did, anyhow.

The house—such at least was my impression—laid claim to the name *bijou* chiefly because of certain verandas on the ground floor, in which wood-trellis, curvilinear fretwork, and a graceful dip in the lead roof combined towards an ornate character. Otherwise, Taste seemed to have kept her distance; unless indeed a mermaid that had climbed up on a plaster bracket to blow a horn had been egged on by her to do so.

We did not at first know where a voice came from—an old old voice—saying:—“What do you two young gentlemen want? It can’t be here.” Then we saw that an old, old man was speaking to us through a funny little grating over the letter-box.

Cooky acted as prolocutor. “This boy’s Governor,” said he, “is looking for a house, and we thought this might do.”

The old man shook his head, still looking at us through the grating, and said:—“You are too young to inspect premises, I’m afraid.”

“This boy’s Governor,” said my friend, “sends him first to look, then comes himself. Where’s the card, Buttons?” This meant my father’s card, which he always made me carry on these excursions as a kind of talisman before which locks and bars would give way, and conviction would reach the souls of caretakers. I put it through the grating into the trembling fingertips of the old boy, and hoped it would appeal to him, somehow. It did, ultimately.

He seemed to read it a good deal before his cracked old voice came again:—"Mecklenburg Square—Mecklenburg Square! Why does your father want to leave his big house in Mecklenburg Square? He wouldn't have any room here. Look at the size of it!" He pushed the card back through the grating for me to take. Acceptance of it would close negotiations perhaps, and I didn't want that. I have often thought how much may have been hanging at that moment on the simple issue—could the interview be prolonged, or not?

I prolonged it by a heedless frankness, whose efficacy surprised me then, being a boy. It does not now. I said:—"Because my mother's dead and the house has to be sold. My governor says we could do with a lot smaller house. I say, Sir, do let us see inside." The card made concession, withdrawing into the house, and the door was slowly opened. "I'll show you the house, my boy. Do you know why?" I said no, and Cooky said no. "Then I'll tell you. I'll show you the house because of why I'm giving it up. It's the same as your father. My wife is dead, and I have to go. We lived here fifty years. The house was new when we came. Come through into the garden and see the fig-tree I planted. Fifty years ago!"

We followed him straight through the house and a greenhouse into the garden. It was a lovely garden, and stretched away to a high hedge with a road beyond, and haycarts, at a standstill at a roadside pothouse. I saw a carter's head and hands and a quart-pot above the mountain of hay that hid his residuum. He had been too lazy to get down for his drink.

There was the fig-tree, sure enough, doing well. I am afraid boys are a cold-blooded race, for the impression it produced on me was that it would be a fine asset for an incoming tenant, preferably my father. We could, however, enter freely on admiration without analysis of its motives, and did so.

But the old man reserved complete assent. "It isn't what it was," said he. "It was open country then. All built up now—all built up!" He looked towards the backs of new houses that were asserting themselves crudely along the King's Road. They did not trouble us.

He took us into the house and showed us the rooms. Everything was in its place, as though there were no lack of use for them—all in good order. Yet the old man seemed alone in the house, at the moment. "I have not allowed them to move anything," said he. "Nothing will be touched till I go." He hung fire a little at one door, which was locked, then opened it saying:—"My wife's room

—our room. Fifty years!—no!—look in and see it.” For we hung back a little. Then he showed us the small coach-house and stable-yard, empty. He had sent the horse and trap away, he said, but his coachman’s wife came in to do for him. That ended the inspection. He said:—“There, boys!—now you’ve seen it. Tell your father, if he comes to see the house, not to go to the agent. I would sooner show it him myself. Tell him it’s small.” He seemed anxious that my father should not make a journey under a misconception, but for all that to hope he would come. Being a boy, I only half read his feelings. I can quite understand them now.

“He’s in Somerset House, my father is,” said I. “He can’t always get away. Might he come late in the afternoon?”

“Why shouldn’t he come on Sunday morning?” said the old gentleman.

“*He’ll* come, fast enough,” said I. It was what I wanted, on my father’s behalf. “It’s Nebuchadnezzar’s Sunday today,” I added, looking at Cooky, and puzzling the old gentleman out of all reason. So I explained:—“Because he’s a Jew, you see, and that’s why we call him Nebuchadnezzar.” Whether I was intelligible I do not know, but it was clear that my father was to come on Sunday, and that the old boy was, for some reason not quite cleared up, rather pleased that he should do so.

Cooky and I threshed the subject out as soon as we were under way again. But discipline demanded that neither of us should show human feeling, for it is unmanly to do so. I broke silence as we crossed Church Street—not before. “What a rum old bird!” said I.

“*Wasn’t* he a rum old bird!” said Cooky.

“I say, Cooky——” I began, tentatively.

“What’s your idea?” said he. “Because I’ve got one.”

“Why—don’t you see—well, it *was* rum, wasn’t it now, to let us in all over the house, when the board said distinctly go to the agent?”

“Well, no!—on the whole, now I come to think of it, I don’t think it particularly rum. Because of what you said!”

“About my Governor?”

“That was my idea. Because it was like!”

“Awfully like, wasn’t it?” Both our voices dropped over this enigmatical interchange, whose meaning was perfectly clear to both of us. The word awfully had, however, no kinship with the subject, being as usual a mere expletive to intensify the exact likeness of the two bereavements, the rum old bird’s and my

father's. It seems to me now that they were singularly unlike in all respects—had nothing in common but the main fact, widowerhood. But our incoherence, as boys, was purely intellectual. Morally, our view was quite sound and healthy. Details of how, where, and when a mate's place in the nest is left empty are as nothing against the one great fact of the void that is left, whether it be in the heart of old birds or young.



## CHAPTER XV

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

So that old man and his wife who was dead and gone, had lived in that house for thirty-seven years when I forsook a harmless non-existence for an equivocal humanity, thirteen years before. Did they snap and bicker, I wonder—those two? I received the impression that they had not done so. But does not the survivor, quenched and gentle after collision with Death, always give that impression? Who would have guessed, to hear my father talk of his life with my mother, that such a thing as a family jar had ever existed? I detect no hypocrisy in it; indeed in my father's case at least, it was honest delusion.

Before I came into this Infirmary—since which time I have been bedridden, or something very like it—I always availed myself of the liberty of my walks out in the neighbourhood to prowl down The Retreat, as my old home was called;—for now it became to me my old home, as then it was old Mr. Wardroper's. That was his name; and though it seemed an improbable one to my youthful mind—and really I thought at the time that he must be mistaken about it—it now strikes me as the only name he could rationally have had. The last time I saw the place I wondered what he would feel if he could come back to life and the sight of it.

For though it remained then an oasis in the desert of bricks and mortar that grew and grew throughout the whole of our occupancy, the signs of its approaching doom were upon it. The entrance gateway swung helpless on one hinge and it seemed no one's business to repair it. The lane was defiled with filth and discarded journalism, and the trees were dead or dying. The gardens remained, but a weed familiar to me that I never knew the right name of had overrun them, and the standard rose-trees were things of the past, though I detected a stick trying hard to pretend it had been one—a stick with prongs, tied long ago with bass to a stick without—yes, tied by a real gardener. Our house was no longer there, but traces of it appeared in the structure of two smaller houses, on its site, one of them inhabited by artists, who had built a studio on *our* garden. Where have they not done so, and who wants the work they do in them? Nemesis had come upon

these, for a giant factory had sprung up and overwhelmed them and their studio, and even the old retreat for that matter. It stood—this factory—on the sites of those intruders old Mr. Wardroper had felt so sore about; the new houses that had blocked the open country out, for him. They had served their turn, been homes and made memories, and been worked up into their own weight of factory. Even so old clothes are made shoddy, to reappear as Fabrics at Stores and be sold for something-three-farthings a yard, and last quite a long time considering how cheap they were. I suppose that one day the factory will come down and make shoddy for flat-builders, who seem to be threatening. How the old bricks will dream of the days when they were the walls of domiciles, with a staircase apiece, and cupboards, and rents that had mercy on the tenants' pockets.

On that day, as I stood and wondered whether the fig-tree the old forgotten inhabitant had planted survived in the back garden, I noticed that our old coachhouse-gate was still there, with its two big globes on piers on either side, but that the coachhouse had gone to make way for the studio. The gate was half buried in garden mould at the back heaped up for a border, and shrubs were thick behind it; and to the front in the road-growth—that curious inevitable change of level that makes towns seem to be courting burial; and explains their discovery underground, long ages after they have been forgotten—the grass and weeds were thick, and fungi were caressing its rotten timbers, and pretending to sympathize with their decay. This old disintegrating portal over which Cooky and I saw the announcement that the clean-painted, scrupulously cared for mansion was for sale, brought home to me the long scores of years I have had to undergo since then, and have somehow had the heart to live through. Here I am so cut away from every outward thing connected with my past, such a mere waif adrift in a current of memory that may at any moment dry up and leave me a prey to nothingness—I resort to nonsense that tells me my own thought, as and when I choose—that it would be almost more relief than pain to me to see the old gate once more, a something visible out of the bygone time, a shred of it to catch at and be convinced of its reality. But I never shall, for I am to be kept quite still by the doctor's orders, lest I should get my release one moment too soon. He is much exercised and interested in the question how long so weak a heart will countenance its owner's life, when every other function is entirely sound, and there is no active disease at all to take the initiative in his extinction. He comes every day to examine it, and talks

about systolic movements and so on; and, though he shows surprise at my pertinacity, is in earnest in his encouragement of it. I think he regards me as an instance of temporary immortality, not warranted by precedent.

I do not talk to him about myself; in fact, I scarcely exchange a word with any one here, except the Matron. She and I are very good friends, now, but shall we continue so, if she persists in suggesting that I should take the blessed Sacrament from the hands of the Rev. Mr. Carpenter, who attends to the souls of such of us as seek his ministrations—that's the word, I believe? I have explained to her that I have never been a member of the Church of England, or of any communion, but she did not seem to attach any weight to this, nor to what I believed, only saying:—"That's because you dislike Mr. Carpenter, but indeed he's a very good man." What had that to do with the matter? He was ordained, I suppose. Miss Ensoll added:—"Perhaps you'll like Mr. Cartwright who is coming instead next Thursday? *He's* heterodox enough, they tell me. I don't think the name's Cartwright though. I think its Mackintosh." Vagueness about names reached perfection in Miss Ensoll's mind.

I shall get back to the old gate directly—in my writing I mean, though never in reality—but before I do so I like to put on record why the Rev. Mr. Carpenter and I only say good-morning. He and I had some talk awhile back, and the good man, to elicit I suppose whatever of orthodoxy was dormant in my soul, sighed—so to speak—over Jews, Turks, Heretics, and Infidels. This nettled me, on Cooky's behalf. I explained civilly that my oldest friend, and one of my dearest, had been an unalloyed Jew, and must have been doomed to a certainty on those lines. And not only that, but that my tobacconist in Bond Street, twenty years back, with whom I was on cordial terms, was an unmistakable Turk, though he sported a Greek name, while my father was surely a Heretic if ever there was one. So that I was not unreasonable in preferring to retain my own Infidelity intact, to have a chance of seeing one of them again, if it were only Lucas Palingorides. The Rev. pulled a long face when he found that his schedules of the damned would include friends of mine, and made concession. We must hope. After all, were not the mercies of God infinite? I am afraid my comment on this, "If so, what's all the fuss about?" put an impassable gulf between me and Mr. Carpenter. For though he is good, he has not the brains to perceive that there is a limit, of his own making, to the mercies of God, as long as we have any occasion for anxiety. Anyhow, the Rev. and I only say

good-morning now. And I think it hard on him—if he is yearning for me—for I had dragged in the *argumentum ab homine*, which is as bad as the *argumentum ad hominem* on this topic of damnation. It is a subject that should be kept free from personalities. Perfect strangers be damned!

Now as to the old gate. My memory, crossing fifty-odd years at a bound, finds me approaching it in a hansom cab beside my father, calling out, "This house on the left," in pursuance of the usage which makes cabs so very anxious to go exactly to their destination and not a yard further. So much so that a proud cab that overshoots its mark will keep you in its jaws while it revokes, in order to be intensely opposite your destination. It is professional feeling, and one has to defer to it.

"Big enough for you and one sister-girl," said my father. "But not for the whole gang." He stopped and left something unsaid, visibly; something perhaps that would have referred to the gang's recent diminution, and qualified it. Instead, he half-whistled till we were admitted by the coachman's wife, still in office till the old bird's flitting. We walked in and Mr. Wardroper came directly, fulfilling a pledge she had given, on his behalf.

I felt greatly relieved to see my father's gradual conversion to a belief in the capacity of the bijou residence. He did not admit it, but I could read his mind well enough to see into his motives when he disclaimed powers of deciding on the accommodation necessary for his three daughters, and represented them, as, so to speak, palatial in their ideas, and very exacting in their demands for superfluous luxuries. He was really building a golden bridge to retreat across in case momentary enthusiasms, provoked by unexpected developments of room-space, should give false hopes either to its owner or myself. As for me, I was so in love with the place, that I was quite surprised that my father did not clinch the bargain, then and there.

I was nearly as much surprised, however, that the old gentleman said nothing, in my hearing at least, to my father of his own wife's death. I wonder now, being an old man myself, that I could not then see what is now so clear to me, that it was far easier for him to talk of his loss to two raw boys than to any fellow-man. Nevertheless, I believe they did speak briefly of their common sorrow, to judge of what I caught of their talk when I returned from a private exploration of the garden; countenanced by both, with cautions from my father to climb nothing, and keep off the borders.

A very few words supplied at a guess, and the talk I heard runs thus:

"I can't say why—No!—I can't say why—but I should like you to have it."

"I will write at once to tell you, if it seems out of the question. I am rather afraid of my girls, because of the size. But we must talk it over. They must come and see for themselves."

"But you like the place?"

"Oh yes, *I* like it very much. And the boy is off his head. . . . Oh, there he is. *You* like it, Eustace John, don't you?"

My enthusiasm found relief in a scornful tone. "Rather!" said I, and my father laughed. The old man smiled—a shadowy smile, not to ignore my father's laugh. But he had something to say:

"Which side of Mecklenburg Square is your house, Mr. Pascoe?"

"North side. Number sixty-four. Did you know it?"

"Oh yes—I knew the Square. But a long while since . . . yes, a very long while since." His voice implied that it was too long ago to talk about, for any practical purpose. I felt curiosity, but my father showed none.

Coming back in the cab, which had waited for us by contract—the supreme being having slept in its recesses while his horse cropped selections above and below, and dealt with flies in detail—my father damped my ardour. Instead of bursting into a pæan over the bijou residence, he merely said:—"Nice little crib!" And when a report was submitted to my sisters of the accommodation available at The Retreat, they rose as one young woman, and protested against its palpable impossibility. Papa was really wasting his time visiting little cottages no one could ever dream of living in, and there all the while was that delicious place at the foot of Highgate Hill, which would be snapped up to a certainty unless opportunity were taken by the forelock, and—one might have added—scalped. Of course Chelsea was nearer Somerset House than Highgate; but when you drove into town, a mile more or less couldn't matter.

That such an argument as this last could be advanced shows me now that even at this date, six months after my mother's death, my sisters were not properly alive to the state of my father's finances. I suppose that they had been hoodwinked by the spurious appearance of solvency that so often casts a glamour over affairs that are being wound up. Many a time in my experience have I known financial desperation in theory to be accompanied by a mysterious command of ready money in practice. Opulence dies game, I suppose, before Retrenchment begins in earnest.



I have to remind myself constantly that an attempt to write what one can remember of one's past need not include the discovery of all its underlying reasons. I was a youngster not fourteen at that time, and when I ask myself now how was it that our brougham and its belongings had not vanished months ago, I find I cannot answer the question. I have a hazy recollection of a phantom aphorism haunting discussions of the situation, to the effect that it would cost just as much to give it up as to keep it on. When I try to remember who uttered it I am altogether at fault. All I know now is that the reason we had a hansom this time was that Roberta and Miss Evans wanted the brougham to drive them to Clapham after Church; and certainly it had carried some of them to the Highgate Hill discovery the day before. I rather think it was this luxury which clung to us and refused to be given up, that was answerable for that view that a mile more or less didn't matter.

"A mile more or less," said my father at lunch that Sunday, "doesn't matter when you drive into town. But when you have nothing to drive in, you *don't* drive into town." He addressed Ellen, Gracey, Mr. Stowe, and Ellen's fiancé—of whom by-the-by nothing has been recorded, owing to my recollecting so little of him. But his name was Wicking, and there are no two ways of recollecting a name like that.

In commune with my Self, I have decided that I am quite justified in forgetting even the little I have retained about Wicking. Surely if there is one person more than another one has a right to forget, it is a young man with too little hair brushed too tight over his head, who was attached to one's elder sister fifty years ago, but who came off, owing to some unsoundness in the attachment. I claim the right to forget Wicking to the full extent of my powers, more especially as he did not shine when detached. He had contrived—so my recollection runs—to force all the responsibility for that operation on my father. However, I am sure it was a let off for Ellen, Varnish said he was a riddance. For all that, I wished I had been big enough to thrash him. If it had been Gracey I really believe I should have made the attempt.

Mr. Stowe laughed aloud in derision at my father's implied renunciation of the brougham. "What's the next article, Strap, my boy?" said he. "What shall we knock off next? Blankets, counterpanes, pillows, animal food, boots and shoes? Give it a name. Which is it to be?"

"The whole of the articles you have enumerated, Mr. Stowe," said my father, with an assumed sententiousness, "belong strictly

to the category of the necessities of life, so called. Broughams nothing of this sort pass the mustard." These last words all ran together, reinforcing meaning by a sudden change of style.

"Don't be in a hurry!" said Mr. Stowe, who was helping himself. "Directly. Wait till I've done with the pot. . . . Now we can pursue the subject. Be good enough to observe that the man who goes in cold blood to live in a suburb, when his vocation is at Somerset House, has to be carried to and fro, or to and not fro, or fro and not to. The same remark applies to his daughters—except Somerset House. But Farmer and Rogers are further from Chelsea than Somerset House." He added, in confidence to my father:—"It's all gammon, Strap. You won't have to part with the brougham. Just you wait and see!"

"Nor Miss Evans, I hope," said Ellen. "Because if you do Bertie's temper will become quite impossible, and it's trying enough as it is. And I shall give up." Ellen always laid claim to being an overtaxed pivot on which all things turned. Which is a simile, but not a happy one; for a pivot contributes nothing to working power, and I am sure my sister was a cypher in the housekeeping, although her constant declarations that she should give up seemed to imply the contrary. I am certain none of the household ever paid the slightest attention to Ellen. Still, her conviction remained that the Universe would collapse if her sustaining power gave out. I despised her at this time, but that was largely on account of her *entichement* for Mr. Wicking. I should have had a low opinion of her in any case as a victim of the tender passion—classing all such as awful idiots—but when its object was *per se* contemptible, scorn must needs reach its climax, and did so. In communion with Varnish, aside, I went great lengths in condemnation of Mr. Thomas Wicking, generalizing freely at his expense. All gentlemen of independent means and no fixed employment were sneaks. Wearers of shiny boots with thin soles were milksops. All habitual bearers of walking canes were stuck-up. All boobies were snobs, and *vice versa*. And Mr. Wicking was a typical offender on all these points. Besides, his trousers were too tight.

The text of my indictments against this culprit is far clearer in my memory than any image of the man himself—a funny trick for one's powers of recollection to play! But it so chances that one of my clearest recollections of him is of his demeanour and appearance at this same Sunday lunch. He was a very polite young man with a startled glare, whose eyeglass never stayed in. It was difficult to resist the conviction that the glare had knocked

it out. He gave the idea that he was always being taken aback by a sudden demand on his powers of courtesy; perhaps because of audible snippets of hesitation that seemed chronic, though they occasionally took form, as, "I—I beg your pardon!" "No, really not on my account!" "Don't mention it, I beg——" "Not of the slightest consequence, I assure you, 'pon my honour!" disclaimers which always seemed to improve his position, and confirm it as that of a very gentlemanly young man. They always got his way for him, under a specious pretext of readiness to stand out of yours. I may be wrong in my recollection that he said, as a sort of grace before meat, "I very seldom touch anything at this time of day," and looked surprised at every single thing that was offered to him; but I am certain of this, that whenever he asked for more, he waited till no more was coming, and then cried in panic:—"Oh, heaps too much!—thank you—thank you!" But he finished it, whatever it was.

"Give up Miss Evans," said my father—this resumes the conversation on previous page—"not so bad as that, Nelly! No, no, we won't give up Miss Evans. She must be Miss Evans to the end of the chapter!"

"Unless she gets married," said both my sisters simultaneously, and thereupon that fool Wicking put down his knife and fork to say in his best society manner:—"Aha yes!—mustn't forget that! 'Tractive young woman under thirty—never can tell!" What I remember specially is his image as he said this, with ten extended admonitory fingers, deprecating rash condemnations to spinsterhood; and then picking up his knife and fork again.

"Think so?" said Mr. Stowe. "Well, I shouldn't wonder, all things considered. Yes." I wondered what were all the things to be considered and decided that one must certainly be Miss Evans's ample crinoline, or rather the yards too many of skirt that hung on it. Perhaps Miss Evans's hair, of which she was vain, and the net she kept it in, might be two more things."

"Unless she gets married of course," said my father. And there can be no doubt that at the time he meant it. He added after reflection:—"No, no—we mustn't compel her to be Miss Evans to the end of the chapter, against her will."

"Miss Evans isn't under thirty," Gracey struck in, in the interests of Truth. "Miss Evans is thirty-one if she's a minute. Because her older sister is six years older, and she's thirty-seven. I know I'm right," added Gracey, flashing into self-justification, to meet and nip in the bud an incredulity that seemed brewing. That fool Wicking was shaking his head and saying:—"Come, I say, you

know. No scandal against Queen Elizabeth!" Which I am certain meant nothing, in the context.

"Then I shall tell Bertie you said so." Thus Ellen, *sotto voce* to Gracey.

"All right. Tell away. I shall say it as much as I like, Bertie or no Bertie! Thirty-one—thirty-one—thirty-one!" Thus Gracey, more *sopra* than *sotto voce*, defiantly. For she and Miss Evans lived in strained relations. It seems singular to me, now, that thirty-one should be counted an age to justify taunts from juniors, and a serious drawback in husband-hunting. It was so, in the middle of last century; and to me, as I think back to it, that seems the other day.

"Hush, hush—children," said my father. "Don't quarrel." Whereupon the encounter, ended, ostensibly; but I am sure I heard Gracey say at intervals, for some time thereafter, "Thirty-one," quite under her breath.

The young lady who was—or wasn't thirty-one did not reappear in the afternoon, as she and Bertie stayed where they lunched till late, only coming back to supper, as dinner was called on Sunday, because only the potatoes were hot. Then afternoon had ended and it was evening. After supper, formal comparison ensued between the Highgate house, seen yesterday, and our new discovery at Chelsea. I only remember that each of the two prospecting parties was so besotted about the perfection of its own find that it would hardly listen to the rhapsodies of the other. In the end, however, as neither could induce the other to go and see the object of its admiration, without pledging itself to a counter-visit, it was arranged that at any rate my sisters and Miss Evans should be driven over to see The Retreat, and I might sit on the box; after which, if they condemned the house unanimously my father would consent to inspect the Laurels, as the Highgate house was called.

But his visit never came off. For Miss Evans, having seen The Retreat and decided in her own mind that it would suit her down to the ground, became almost hysterically impressed with the hardships my father would have to undergo, travelling daily twice over the distance between Highgate and Somerset House. She had laid a very marked stress, the evening before, on the fact that this distance was the only blot on the other house's scutcheon, otherwise flawless. I suppose I had an unsuspecting soul in those days, for I never saw anything in Helen Evans's growing consideration for my father, except indeed that it redeemed other faults I ascribed to her. And I am sure my father saw nothing. However, she began



dawning upon me a little later. For the time being, her change of front about the house almost made me forgive her other shortcomings.

Then follow memories of many councils, waverings, and decisions, each with its affix of my father's face perplexed and anxious, like a seal on a document. Then a final visit of mine with him to The Retreat; and then the die was cast. We were to leave the old home and make new lives in a new one, for worse or better, as might be. I became alive to the fact that the joys of house-hunting, choosing of wall-papers, ingenious accommodations of old furniture and extravagant purchases of new, cannot be indulged in without their counter-sorrow of the old domicile forsaken.

As van after van of goods departed from Mecklenburg Square, each one leaving behind it its contribution of barren floor and vacant wall, whose echoes had been dormant for twenty years, and now revived to startle us, the sadness of its desertion after all those years of service wound itself about my heart, and I found myself appealing to my sex to protect me against a choking sensation in the throat—an experience I ascribed to sisters and suchlike, which I should no doubt have called mawkish sentimentalism if that valuable phrase had formed part of my vocabulary. Looking back now, and communing together, my Self and I have agreed to discern in it the evidence that a sort of development had germinated; and to set some store by the fact, small as it is, that I blew my nose about the discovery of this sensation, having no cold to warrant my doing so, more than once. Manhood protested, but was I not a boy?

In due course the last van's greed was satiated, and things my sisters had prayed might be overlooked stuffed into it by a mistaken enthusiasm to be sure that nothing was left behind. The owner of the van—whose name may have been Satterthwaite, as his card—after describing his resources and adding the brief remark, "Removals," enforced the words, "Personal attention to everything," by a pictorial hand with a cuff, pointing at them—took it very much to heart that my father would not allow him to remove certain old boxes in what I have called the Chemistry Room. They included the celebrated box which contained the Heliconides, and others which had also been opened more than once, but always with the same result, that despair—despair of ever finding appreciators for their contents—repacked them after a brief examination, and called out for hot water to wash its hands.

It seems to me that I remember the first exploration of these boxes more clearly now than I remember being able to recall it



on any subsequent occasion. When my father, at the dismantling of the drawing-room, captured the Chinese Buddha and some other things which had been brought down from them, saying that Freeman must do the repacking because he took them out, the discovery of the vases came back to me—I am sure of it—less clearly than it does now, as I lie here letting the past mix itself with the sounds of life without, but putting no stress on Memory, lest some spurious Mnemosyne should slip in and take her place. Recollection goes to sleep briskly in childhood and sleeps sound. I awakened mine then with an effort, to bring back that day seven years earlier, when Pandora's box let the Heliconides loose upon us, and it remained drowsy. It is more wakeful now, to my thinking. But I may be mistaken.

Anyhow, Mr. Freeman recollected. If there was a scrap of noosepaper 'andy, he would undertake to repack these so that the Queen herself could do no better and you wouldn't think they'd ever been took out. He often referred to the Throne as a standard climax, to add emphasis to achievement by imputing to her Majesty inability, though Royal, to outshine it. He was removing the Buddha upstairs, when he was held up—cut off short—by Miss Evans, who presently received the moral support of Ellen and Roberta, to counterpoise my father's confirmation from below of Mr. Freeman's report of his instructions as to the disposal of the Chinese affair, as his scorn termed it. "'Wot the guv'nor said was to re-pack-as-before, or on sim'lar lines. As directed, so I done. I don't hargue."

The ladies did argue, and over-ruled my father, Mr. Freeman awaiting decision with a stolid self-subordination that silently condemned all handling of the case but his own, reserved. He accepted the outcome with:—"Very well then, *that's* to be 'eld to! This here goes back to the van, the others goes in the box." For my father had compromised with his conscience, which had prompted him to forestall a possible outbreak of Settlement from my Uncle Francis by putting back in the box all that came out of it, and leaving it locked up to be settlementeered at pleasure when he handed the house over to that impracticable trustee. So Mr. Freeman reinstated the other contents, and my father locked the door of the Chemistry Room to baffle Satterthwaite, with whom no mere instructions had any weight at all when he was, so to speak, on the war-path; by which I mean at such times as he was straining after his high ideal of not letting nothing get left behind.

I remember well the last few minutes, after my sisters and Miss Evans had departed for Chelsea, where Varnish and Gracey awaited

them, when Satterthwaite and his myrmidons, husky and beery in the twilight—for the September day was wearing out—consented to relinquish them goods in the top attic, to admit reluctantly that in course the Governor knew best if you came to that, ad to go. Then my father and I were left alone, to say farewell. For me, farewell to mere childhood; such an easy parting in view of the coming years, with an insignificant past almost slightly flung aside to welcome the resplendent life ahead—all its glories taken for granted! For him, farewell to the house he entered, a happy bridegroom, more than twenty years ago.

“Now, Master Eustace John!” said he, with resolute cheerfulness. “One more look from top to bottom, to see all clear and nothing on fire, and then off we go!”

“All right, Pater!” said I. I hope I understood a little—was not entirely opaque. I didn’t feel at all confident about it.

The garrets were not on fire, clearly. So far good. My father opened the door of the Chemistry Room, glanced in, and relocked it. As I recall now, quite plainly, this last peep into my old den. I wonder why, so many faces of friends and kin having vanished from me in my long life, I should so often forget outright, when and where they vanished. Why have I lost *them*, when I have kept the Chemistry Room? Memory laughs at my attempts to understand her.

The next floor below was not on fire, neither. In one of the rooms, the nursery that seems to me still *the* nursery of all nurseries, though other rooms elsewhere usurped the name to my knowledge, there lay on the floor Gracey’s doll that dropped behind the wardrobe nine years ago, and had been choking unrescued in accumulating dust ever since. I did not know it at first, it seemed so small. I remembered a doll as long as my arm. It was not so very much longer than my hand now. I wrapped it in a piece of green paper that was at large, and secured it, conceiving it humorous to carry it to Gracey and offer it to her for readoption. What reinforces this recollection is that when Gracey died eighteen years later, this doll was found among her leavings in the self-same green paper, on which was written the name it had been baptized by, and an inscription:—“Florindia. Brought away by Jackey from dear Mecklenburg Square, Sept. 25, 1853.”

Neither was the floor beneath on fire. Seeing that my father checked each floor off in this way, as we left it, I do so too. His voice fell, but he said it nevertheless as we ended up the sleeping rooms with the one my mother had died in. Then came his own room and the drawing-room, neither a prey to the flames, but each

the home of unaccustomed unnatural echoes, and stamped upon its walls the grisly stencillings of light, obscured by furniture and pictures, on a flock paper whose colours had fled in darkness—a distinguished paper that once was new! And now I know how my father's mind was going back to the days of its glory; thinking perhaps, as I have done since in a like case, how hard it is that wall-paper must see carpet and curtain go, that it started so bravely neck-and-neck with, and be left to fate; perhaps not even cleaned with bread, but stripped by unfeeling hands, and taken away in a builder's rubbish-cart, because the Dust won't countenance it, to the nearest shoot that money will bribe to accept it.

My father finished his inspection of the house so conscientiously, that he was not content without glancing into the cellars. Evidently, nothing was on fire. He added to a verdict to this effect, that it was as well to do it thoroughly while we were about it; and then seemed, with a sigh, to make up his mind to go—to face the wrench of actual last departure. I threw the street-door wide open, letting the last afterglow of the sunset in on the panelled partition that enclosed the kitchen stairs, and then something caught my father's eye, as he paused to brush a cellar-soil from his sleeve. "What's that?" said he, pointing to the angle of the skirting.

"Only a hole," said I.

"Only a hole!" said my father. "The crater of Mount Etna is only a hole. However, this isn't quite so big, certainly. I never saw this before. How's that?"

I volunteered an explanation, which I believe was unnecessary, as the thing was obvious. The base of the skirting had been slotted by some former tenant, for no purpose that we could see, and to conceal the slot the oil cloth on the hall-floor had been cut full and turned up against the skirting over half-an-inch. It had been left undisturbed whenever the woodwork was repainted—for no one ever disturbs oilcloth—and now a straight line of many coats of paint showed where it had come away.

"Put your finger in, Jackey," said my father. "Exercise due caution and don't scratch it with nails. See how deep back it goes." I did so promptly, scorning caution, and showed the depth on my finger. "What's behind?" said my father.

"Wood," said I, confidently. And I was right; for an overhead cupboard had been contrived in the kitchen stair-flight, and I had touched the side of it. I jumped up and saw that this cupboard was visible through an opening in the panel above the slot. The removal of a box that we used to call the Private Post Office was

responsible for this, somehow, but I did not understand why even Satterthwaite's enthusiasm should have carried away part of the panel, till my father explained it afterwards.

The box had, when first fixed, been found to project awkwardly over the hall table where trays paused—for in those days lifts were not so common as now—and had been set back into the panelling, so that the cupboard side had been its back, its own having been cancelled to make space.

"Stop a bit, young man, and allow your seniors to come," said my father. He tried to get his stick into the slot between the cupboard and the perforated panel, but it was too thick. I saw his object and with juvenile sharpness hit on a device. I folded a piece of thick brown paper that had come out in the cold from under the dining-room carpet, and thrust it down the narrow slot, working it up and down.

"Now feel again," said my father. And I felt again.

"Well," said he, "what do you feel?"

"There's a stiff corner," said I. "It's an envelope. I can't get it out."

"Look here, Master Jackey," said my father, with interest growing in his voice, "you run round to Cornick the carpenter's and tell him to come at once, whether he's at supper or not. And bring his tools."

"Just let me have another try," said I. "With your knife with the corkscrew on it." He let me have my way; and with this corkscrew, which opened like a blade, lengthwise, I managed to extract a letter through the slot. It rumbled, but it came. I handed it to my father, who took it saying:—"Any more?" It was too dark where we were, to read the writing. I extracted a second letter, and then, as no exercise of my brown paper slot-sweeper produced a third, we started for the nearest cabstand.

There could be no doubt of what had happened. The Private Post Office had been a depository of letters for the Public Post, to be carried to the nearest Office by Anybody, next time Anybody went out. It was open at the top; so that Anybody, when he fished out its contents, might easily have helped a letter or two into the slot below, provided that an accommodating rift existed in the box-floor above it. There must have been such a rift—else matter passed through matter. Therefore, there was such a rift. Perhaps the box-floor did not touch the cupboard.

I can understand now why my father took this discovery so easily at the moment. These two letters were not lost letters that had never reached their destiny, in which case some awkward revela-

tion might have been in store for him. They were *from*, not *to*, inmates of the house, and to my thinking that made the whole difference. They had missed being posted every day for twenty years or so—that was all!

I was so undisturbed by this incident that I did not credit it with any share in my father's whiteness, and almost tremulousness, as we rode home—for now The Retreat was to be home—nor with the fact that after we arrived I heard through a thickness of soap-suds, as I cleared off the last dirt Mecklenburg Square was ever to bestow on me, an inquiry for brandy for Papa, who seemed quite dead with fatigue, counter-ordered by his own voice saying:—"No—no! I shall be all right. No brandy!" I put everything down to the mere strain and stress of the day, except what my crude perceptions detected as emotion—not a large fraction.

Perhaps if we had not met Nebuchadnezzar round the corner, I should have been in better form for taking notice. As it was, we boys were deep in conversation at the moment when my father first read the directions of these letters by the light of a street-lamp. It was after that though, not before, that I became aware how white he had become.

One of these letters my father returned unopened to its writer, Varnish, who showed it to me. It was to her sister, and in it I read that the baby was a beautiful child and was to be called Ellen; the King was going to open the "New Parliament House"; and Master had spoke very serious to Mr. Freeman, who had promised to become "a teetotaller." This last item fixes no date, because "The Man's" promises of total abstinence were of all dates; but the other two point to the year 1832. Varnish had only dated her letter January 21.

Gracey was inquisitive about it, and asked—was it an old letter too? My father replied:—"Yes, yes—older—older! But it was nothing. And the person it was written to is dead, ages ago."

So Gracey had to suppress her curiosity to know more.



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE STORY

Is it not Browning who tells us that the charm and beauty of youth are given us to hide the crudeness of the spirit in its early years of growth, that were we to look deeper into those frank and innocent eyes and read the minds of the sweet angelic looking boys and girls of our acquaintance, we should find ignorance, yes! but ignorance alone that stood between them and the ideals of the worst of the Roman Emperors. If you doubt this statement just take the spirit of any vigorous baby you are acquainted with, and transfer it into the body of an elderly middle-aged friend of yours, and you would soon see that Browning knew what he was writing about.

Now when Mr. Pascoe found that unposted letter written by his girl wife twenty years previously, and directed to John Emery, Esquire, Cutch, India, he would have acted more fairly by her, and certainly as the sequel proved, with greater advantage to himself, had he burnt it unread. Jack Emery why, of course, he recollected him perfectly well now. A handsome young fellow, a playmate of Cæcilia's in her childhood! Went to India, accepted an appointment in a bad climate, no prospects to speak of, had to take what turned up, and later on married a begum. But what on earth could Cæcilia have been writing to him about! And Mr. Pascoe broke open the sealed envelope and unfolding the yellowing pages, read as follows:

JACK,

I am married! It is done! And I feel I ought not to be writing to you at all, but I said I would and I shall keep my promise. And you must keep yours my poor, dear, darling Jack, and not answer this letter, and never, never write to me, or see me again. I shall always love you deep down in my heart, and don't blame me, dearest old Jack, papa did it! He simply ordered me to give you up. I had no choice. I could not do any differently. You know how it all was, you know I could not help it!

I am getting on very happily with Nat Pascoe, he is a very good fellow, but he is not you, that is all I have against him. And I

have such a lovely home, so now you must forget me, my poor old Jack, and find a nice rich bride and be happy with her.

Yours still, but for the last time remember,

Your loving CÆCILIA.

And yet in those far-away days of their courtship, Cæcilia had kissed Nathaniel Pascoe on the lips and sworn to him that he was her first and only love! . . . And with the reading of that letter the heart-whole allegiance of twenty long years snapped and broke!

Yet all the same the unfortunate Cæcilia was the mother of his children and had been a good and faithful wife to him. Had she herself in the days of her maturity unearthed the long forgotten letter, the chances are she would have laughed over that episode of boy and girl love, and forgiven herself her act of duplicity on the score of her youth and immaturity.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE STORY

THE garden of The Retreat was very pleasant on that fine October morning, so thought Miss Evans as she wandered round with her basket and pruning scissors, intent on a little amateur gardening; so far there had been no frosts and the roses still lingered on, great bushes of blue asters, and a few rich coloured chrysanthemums glowed brightly in the morning sun, yes it was altogether restful and refreshing.

The move from Mecklenburg Square had been successfully accomplished, and the family had settled down in their new home, welcoming the change of surroundings and trusting to it, and the lapse of time to soften the painful memory of their mother's tragic end.

Mr. Pascoe had resumed his duties at Somerset House and was always absent till the evening, Jackey was back at school again, the two elder girls went their own independent ways resenting any interference on the part of Miss Evans, Gracey alone justifying the presence of a governess in the house, by the few hours devoted daily to her studies under Miss Evans's tutelage.

Roberta's strong affection for Helen Evans had cooled down perceptibly, and though they still shared the same room, the glamour of the friendship had died away, and had Roberta been older, and better able to analyze her feelings towards her friend, she would have summed them up in the one word "distrust," though why she distrusted her she could not have said.

On this particular morning Helen Evans was feeling satisfied and fairly content with her position. She felt that each day as it passed made her more and more indispensable to the master of the house. Ellen's attempts at performing the duties of mistress of the household, though backed energetically by the faithful Varnish, were never very successful, and her failures were skilfully commented on by Miss Evans in the hearing of her father, with the result that Mr. Pascoe entertained a growing admiration for Helen's powers as a housekeeper.

As for Roberta, her passion for private theatricals which she shared with her friends, the Graypers, caused Miss Evans, so she told Mr. Pascoe, great anxiety. But what could she do? She had no real authority. Mr. Pascoe ought positively to put his

foot down and stop this craze for perpetual acting. What Miss Evans feared was, that a girl like Roberta, with no mother to look after her, might so easily drift on to the stage. And her father, who had never seen his daughter act, or he would have been completely reassured on that score, was made very uneasy, and implored Miss Evans to do all that lay in her power to prevent such a catastrophe taking place. He could not bear the idea, he said, of Roberta becoming a professional actress! It would never do at all! Something must be done to stop it! Miss Evans was absolutely right there; in fact, she always was right about everything, a perfectly invaluable woman, so thought Mr. Pascoe. On this particular autumn morning Helen Evans was feeling decidedly pleased with herself. Her navy blue morning dress was very fresh and becoming. Her beautiful white hands were carefully protected by leather gardening gloves, and as she clipped away at the dead leaves on the rose bushes her thoughts ran riot. Of course, Mr. Pascoe was no longer the incipient millionaire with the golden doors of wealth opening wide before him. But, after all, it was very much not poverty, as Miss Evans knew it. No, decidedly, it was not poverty! With a brougham and a horse and a coachman and stables, and then this very charming Chelsea house with its big garden, and a well set-up household and servants to wait upon one! Things certainly might be worse, and after all, what had happened once might it not happen again? Fortunes went up and down, and occasionally down and up, especially, might this be looked for with any one like Mr. Pascoe, who had shown such a distinct genius for money-making; no, it was not so bad, after all! As for that! . . . Well . . . that episode! . . . She was safe there. No one had ever so much as asked her a single question on the subject. She was not implicated in any way! Roberta knew that she had just put her head in at the door of Mrs. Pascoe's room on her way downstairs, and that was all. No one in the household had ever grasped the fact that she had even done that. To all intents and purposes, she and Roberta had been out of the house during the whole time of the occurrence—yes, she was perfectly safe! She had absolutely nothing to fear! She could put her mind at rest. And Miss Evans's large, dark eyes glanced up at the pretty house with its vine-covered walls—decidedly a nice house to be mistress of!

At an upper window stood Varnish gazing intently at the governess, and as their eyes met Helen Evans shivered in the sunshine.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

OUR flitting was just before Michaelmas, 1853, so that events had travelled very fast since the first discovery of The Retreat by Cooky and myself in the early summer. That any builder who undertook to complete in a month should do so in six weeks shows that the repainting and papering that was decided on was very plain sailing, without the ghost of a hitch. No doubt, the good condition the house was left in, made the work particularly easy. Though my father's lease was from September, old Mr. Wardroper gave up possession in July, and all his belongings were removed to make way for white lead and boiled oil and trestles; and, as soon as redecoration subsided internally, for our furniture to quarrel for floor-space among themselves—for furniture is intrinsically plural—our turn came. Outside the house three good coats of stone colour on all work previously painted, and a dazzling green on the woodwork of the veranda and the iron palings and front gate took their own time about drying, so as to favour the fourth good coat. And were so long over it that it looked as if the builder had not been taken into the confidence of boiled oil before he submitted his estimate.

None of us saw the old tenant again at that time. The old boy had screwed himself up to the wrench of moving, as soon as his granddaughter, a widow lady with one child, could arrange to take him in. When I saw him again, some two years later, he looked to be vanishing, as some very old folks do—just as though they might die of a rough handshake, or a loud voice too near them. But, like many another, he was stronger than he looked, and lived for many years after that.

My father was interviewed by a grandson-in-law, who seemed to have the management of affairs, to settle the transfer of the remainder lease. He looked like my idea of a betting man—a fairly accurate idea as I have since found—when I saw him on the steps at Mecklenburg Square talking to my father after an interview about the lease. I understood, however, that he was “in the Law,” somewhere undefined. I was coming home from an exhilarating day spent chiefly on the water at the Welsh Harp,



and only came in for the fag end of the conversation. The visitor was speaking.

"The reason the old man talks about Mecklenburg Square is that my wife's sister, Mrs. Addison, lived there with her husband. Couldn't say anything about which house. Never saw him. Wasn't in England. Don't know anything about him."

"Mrs. Addison is a widow?"

"B'leeve so—yes, certainly! Widow of course. Never saw her husband. . . . Well, you see, I only married my present wife three years ago, and then Mrs. Addison was a widow. Wife's family! That sort of thing."

My father seemed to accept this as lucid, and expressed no surprise at this gentleman's unreadiness in family history. But he said he could not remember any Addison in the Square, and it was funny, because he thought he had known the names of all the people who had left the Square in his time. There had only been Partridge and Fraser and Strachan. And Addison was neither Partridge nor Fraser nor Strachan. It only showed how little we knew about our neighbours. The gentleman said, taciturnly, yes, it showed that. And he would have the lease ready by Monday. And he thought it was working up for a thunderstorm, but he had an umbrella. Good-evening, Mr. Pascoe!

My father wouldn't let this undiscovered ex-neighbour of ours alone, catechizing my sisters and Varnish and Miss Evans as to their memories of bygone residents. But nobody had ever heard of Addison. Mr. Mapleson held out hopes, being confident that the party had been misled by the similarity of the name of the people at number twelve, which he had forgotten, himself. It turned out to have been Endicott, so from no point of view was Mr. Mapleson illuminating.

Our retention of the brougham, and its establishment in the coachhouse at The Retreat was so mixed up with the relations of my father with his creditors that I never mastered the subject properly. I always saw in the huge sums that floated about the winding-up of that Bank, great distant abstraction that could never dirty their hands with such small matters as furniture and broughams. They were to me like high tension currents to the electricians, and I had had no experience of their conversion to low tension, and development of what Mr. Cranium called a *cataballative* quality. I find I remember "Headlong Hall"; though I have not seen it for half a century. Would it amuse me now, I wonder?

I suppose the fact to have been—only I don't understand these things and there is no one here who does, that I know of—that in the early days of a winding-up which took its time, the sufferers were the depositors and the writers or holders of dishonoured cheques. Mr. Boethius had sold all his shares to my father, so *he* could not suffer. Mr. Tripp had changed all his money to diamonds, hung them on Mrs. Tripp, and vanished; so *he* was safe. Mr. MacCorquodale was safest of all—for he did not exist; he was a name! Envidable man! I heard the expression “men of straw” used more than once by winders-up, or victims, who interviewed my father at this time, and later experience inclines me to believe that the other shareholders, whoever they were, were meant. My father's assets, claimable by the creditors, as I understand, to the last farthing, were probably their only *pièce de résistance*.

I took for granted the sheets of figures that abounded at this date as correct—for see how beautifully written they were! How could such ciphering err? And where such very large sums were being written down, things were sure to come out all right, somehow. My father would see to that. So I really never knew anything about the matter, worth knowing.

Mere surmise—by a veteran without a document to refer to—points to concessions by creditors in return for some form of bond giving them a claim on his earnings. It was desirable that he should be kept going as long as possible, to earn them; and the brougham contributed to this, obviously. So long as he went and came every day, to and from Somerset House, was there much balance of gain in any substitute for the brougham? I know it was our only luxury in the days that followed, unless Miss Evans was one. I had my doubts on that point.

Still, I myself believe that my father would have over-ruled the brougham, as a sheer extravagance for people in our position, and perhaps underlet the coachhouse, if it had not been for Mapleson, the impassive young man with two identities, one of which I came to know for the first time when the proximity of The Retreat coachhouse forced its inner life upon us. If Mapleson had been Shiva or Vishnu, his two Avatars could not have been much more unlike each other. Mapleson on the box, with conformity oozing, one might say, from every pore, was one thing; Mapleson in shirt sleeves, with pails, in the stable-yard, was another.

I became familiar with the latter; an Avatar which in its former home in a mews had been, so far as the Square was concerned, little better than discarnate. It opened its heart to me, as far as the hinges would allow it to go, in the intervals of at-

tacks on the horse with a currycomb. I inferred from what I heard that Mr. Mapleson had become attached to the family, and would not be happy if either of his incarnations came to an end with us, though reincarnate elsewhere. This one could communicate to me what that other could not disclose to my father, without breach of discipline. It was not fond of change and was at present sooted. It recognized the fact, nevertheless, that King's Road, Chelsea, could not pretend to hold its head as high as Mecklenburg Square, and instead of claiming compensation for loss of caste, as uncultured greed might have done, generously hinted that under the circumstances it could not expect the same figure. If I was agreeable to do so, I might name it to the Governor that it was prepared to take less, and so pave the way to an understanding.

I told my father that Thomas—a name that seemed to me warranted by the shirt sleeves, while *grande tenue* on a box called for Mapleson—would be awfully sorry to leave us; but when I came to ask myself how Thomas had managed to express his affection for his employer, I found that, strictly speaking, he had never done anything of the sort. He had conveyed the idea to me by vilipending the remainder of the human race, as employers; saying that he knew when he was well off, and that there was very little dependence to be put on everybody else. With a Governor like my father, you knew where you were. Further, if he might make so bold, there were a many ways in which a young man might be useful about the house—there was the garden for instance—and he was always agreeable. Besides, he thoroughly understood poultry; no man better.

I think my father was pleased and relieved when I reported to him the shirt sleeve Avatar's appreciation of itself. He had been contemplating a proposal to the other one, embodying the same ideas, all but the poultry. But his awe of that august being had stood in the way of his making it. He now accepted Thomas, as an intercessor and mediator between him and Mapleson.

"As to the poultry," said he, "I hope he understands their motives and impulses better than I do. I always find them perplexing to the last degree. But if he has enough influence with them to persuade them to postpone certain noises they know how to make, until a reasonable hour in the morning—why, fowls by all means!"

So we had fowls.

When I made that last expedition to The Retreat, and measured its decay against my memory of its past, nothing made me so sad

as the half-hearted cluck of a joyless hen somewhere out of sight, bringing back as it did the controversies that raged over those fowls of ours—my father's frequent resolutions to abolish them—my sisters defence of their position—the different estimate of the value of new-laid eggs by sleepers in the front and back of the house respectively. Was I all wrong in thinking that, however much too soon they roused me on summer mornings, their intolerable chorus, as my father called it, was at least one of exultation—an awkward hymn of praise, suppose we say? Was I right in setting down that woe-begone croak of their successor, fifty years later, as an ill-worded lament over the traditional delicacies of a stable-yard, handed down through countless broods of chicks, uttered by their most dilapidated survivor? Sound and smell and taste bring back what sight leaves in oblivion, and this sound brought back those summer mornings, and the leaf-flicker of the vine across my window, and the sparrows in it, quarrelling cheerfully. And myself, and my youth, and my unconsciousness of the things to be. Then I turned away and forgot that early time, to think of how those things came about, and what they made me.

I am told that now nothing is left of the old house. It will all be a residential neighbourhood soon, with *maisonnettes* at the best. The indwellers will dream undisturbed through the early daylight, unless passing motors hoot into their dreams and murder sleep. The last cock will have crowed its farewell; supposing, that is, there is one still left to crow. Childless couples—a numerous class nowadays—will find room enough with a little spirit of mutual accommodation in a cubic area, about which the less said the better. It is a curious thing that cubic areas are so small. Yet they appear to foster rents double that of houses where they are unknown. I sometimes doubt the existence of one in Mecklenburg Square. No one ever tried to find it, certainly. However, we had no bathroom there; *maisonnettes* have that feather in their cap. The childless couples can always have a bath, granting the spirit aforesaid. And there may be more room in a flat than one thinks, though it appears that one cannot get a servant to stop in one. I heard Miss Ensoll saying so to the new Parson, or rather the temporary *locum tenens* of the Rev. Mr. Carpenter. He is a great big man, more like a sea-captain than a parson, but I like his voice. It travels well, without grating on one. His name is neither Cartwright nor Mackintosh, but Turner.

We were a good-sized family for the house, but we all found a corner in it and thought ourselves well off. There was room



for all without any strain on mutual accommodation. The size of it and the space it occupied seemed on good terms with one another—although indeed, now that I have written it, I have my doubts whether that means anything. Several childless couples might have lived in it without quarrelling, I am sure of that. Also, that all the womankind but Gracey and Varnish had an undercurrent of belief that each for her part had made great sacrifices in order that the others might live in palatial luxury, and felt therefrom the satisfaction of conscious generosity. This is like Gibbon, but then perhaps it is the sort of thing Gibbon would have said, and spiteful. Only I am sure Miss Evans deserved it, if the others didn't, as thoroughly as some objects of Gibbon's sarcasms deserved them.

Varnish never made a secret of her feelings to me, and at this time a subacute exasperation against Miss Evans, always latent, began to take a more defined form. I was too young at first to follow her ideas closely; an older mind than mine would have detected her apprehensions, and might have shared them. I remained for some time unimpressed, ascribing Varnish's seeming *accés* of resentment against the governess to its ostensible cause, and suspecting nothing behind it. But I was illuminated in the end, and I remember the occasion.

It must have been two months or more after the move, for there was snow on the ground, when Varnish said to me, at one of our confidential foregatherings over tea, now in a room called the pantry, a sort of lobby of the kitchen:—"It's only a year, Master Eustace, since your dear ma was took." I immediately became absorbed in a problem that vexed me greatly then and has hung heavily upon my understanding all through life—what ought I to say about the dead, in conversation with the living? Should I respond to my old nurse in the sacred hopeful tone, the dumb acquiescence tone, or that of mere lamentation, with passing compliments to the departed? I was not qualified for the first; my education had been neglected. The second—or Greek tone, one might say—would have seemed un-Christian to Varnish. I had to fall back on the third, leaving the eulogiums to be taken for granted. If necessary, Varnish would insert them.

I must have taken my time over deciding, if Varnish's speech that escaped my attention was a plausible connecting link with what followed. For when I had muttered what seemed fit to me, I found that she had already passed to some phase of the topic that I could not at once understand, causing me to say, "Why shouldn't she?"—the "she" I referred to being Miss Helen Evans.

"Why, Master Eustace," Varnish answered, "if not artful, no



reason at all! But you are young and cannot see through. Only . . . Well!—you ask any of the young ladies, and go by them. I could wish I might be wrong.”

Gracey came into the room, and stood by the fire. “What about, Varnish dear?” said she.

I volunteered to explain:—“Why, look here, Gracey, Varnish says Miss Evans oughtn’t to button the Governor’s coat.”

“Does she?” said Gracey, emphatically, meaning—did Miss Evans do so?

“There you see now, Master Eustace, your sister’s never seen her do it! What did I tell you just now about artfulness?”

Gracey qualified what her emphasis had seemed to imply:—“But really, Varnish, I do *not* see anything in that, now one comes to think of it. I buttoned Nebuchadnezzar’s beautiful new fur coat for him only the other day, on purpose. Why shouldn’t I?” I welcomed this precedent.

But Varnish disallowed it. “Because you are two children, my dear. Besides, Master Moss is a Jew, and out of the question.”

I advanced a view which I now seriously think for snobbishness of conception, vulgarity of expression, and inapplicability to its point, is without a parallel in the records of bad argument. “Isn’t Miss Evans a governess and out of the question?” said I. My inexperience was fructifying on the subject.

Neither of my hearers was competent to overwhelm me with the refutation I deserved. Varnish said weakly:—“Governesses are not Jews, but Christians, Master Eustace.” Gracey entrenched her position. “You’re a little boy, Jackey, and had better shut up,” said she. Which I thought unfair, as I was in the discussion, by hypothesis. She added, after reflection:—“I suppose Papa knows best, and it’s his concern, anyhow!”

I felt on unsafe ground. After all, was not the whole thing outside my province? I remembered that all the evidence had not been heard. “Varnish said more things,” said I. But I shrank from further responsibility.

“What did you say more, Varnish dear?” said Gracey. “Say it again for me.” She was hugging our old nurse, persuasively, over the back of her chair, as she said this.

“No, my dear,” said Varnish, “I shan’t say another word. But there’s no need, for any one can see, that looks, when a young person is layin’ herself out, and when she isn’t. It don’t depend on any telling of mine. But there, the Lord be praised, that is where it is, and a deceitful person has only herself to blame, come what may!” I believe Varnish was already repenting of having talked

so openly to us two youngsters, and was falling back on an enigmatical tone as a safe resource. She filled out obvious blanks with oracular nods, and affected absorption in the problem of whether tea would go round for a second cup, without draining the pot. You should never do that, in case of anybody else. I adopt her expression.

"But I say!—what humbug!" said I, fructifying—for I was sharp enough. "Who ever heard of such rot? Fancy *Jemima* trying it on with the Governor!" This name, *Jemima*, was a confidential name of Miss Evans, seldom used outside secret conclaves of Varnish, Gracey, and myself. It was founded on a passage in Dickens. "*Miss J'mima Ivins, and Miss J'mima Ivinses friend, and Miss J'mima Ivinses friend's young man,*" are to be found in *Sketches by Boz*.

"If she only buttons his coat——" began Gracey, who seemed inclined to think an unjust imputation had been launched; though she may also have felt in danger of throwing stones from a glass house, after her own coat-buttoning escapade. She finished her speech in another key altogether:—"All I know is that I shall button Monty's coat as often as I like, whether or no! So there!"

"Till you're grown up, my dear," said Varnish.

"I can't see the difference," said Gracey. "A coat's a coat!"

"That is not where the question turns on, my dear," said Varnish, not quite without pride in her powers of expression. "The coat is only one way round and no one knows that better than Miss Evans. You may call her *Jemima*, *Master Eustace*, but the thing is the same or similar. And put it how you may, artfulness is at the bottom of it, and nothing but artfulness."

"I say—look here!" said I. "I want it put out in language. What's *Jemima's* game?" Then I lost force by not awaiting a reply:—"Because she won't be any the wiser, if it's that!" I think I diluted this even further, by saying I would bet anything I was right, but not naming the odds; so that my offer remained the expression of a pious confidence in my own infallibility. Varnish and Gracey may have felt that I was a crude exponent of my own ideas, for they proceeded to talk over my head, taking no notice of my occasional marginal notes. Thereafter the conversation ran thus:

"Your pa, my dear, knows what is due to himself—no one better, so, as I say, it's not for us! But if you come to seeing through, all I say is, don't ask me what I think of any person with an underhanded countenance. Looks goes for nothing; though Miss Evans has her share, I willingly admit. But what I look at

is the 'art'—here I felt perplexed as to whether Varnish meant the subtlety of the lady in question, or the metaphorical seat of good and bad feeling—"and her deceitfulness is bore out by her actions, every day."

"But she only buttoned Papa's coat!"

"This time, my dear, yes! But, other times, a hundred things. Interference in what does *not* concern. For if Cook, after such a many years, does not know your dear papa's likings, who can pretend to it?"

"Cook's an awful fool about potatoes." This side-note of mine had reference to a perversity of Cook's, which sacrificed the alleviation of cold joints by baked potatoes in their skins, to the serving of these vegetables in connection with hot ones, prematurely. It extenuated Miss Evans, somewhat.

"I'm not sure I don't like her best,"—so said Gracey, wavering towards a forgiving tone—"when she worries over Papa's dinner."

"Law, Miss Gracey, as if there wasn't plenty to give attention, without *her* meddling!"

But I endorsed my sister's judgment. "I don't hate Jemima half so much when she goes in for badgering Cook," said I, forcibly. Whereupon Varnish seemed to feel out-voted, and in a minority, for she said:—"Well, my dears, all I say is, I hope I may live to find myself mistook. Young folks know best, nowadays."

My enlightenment from this conversation was out of all proportion to the amount of direct accusation brought against Miss Evans by Varnish. She had not formulated any specific indictment, except that of buttoning my father's coat. Otherwise, she had merely put on record her conviction that the lady was artful. I had at once jumped to her meaning, and so had Gracey.

We two young people resolved ourselves into a committee of observation, and at intervals reported progress. Not consciously; but that is how the survivor sees them, looking back sixty years afterwards. The committee sat through that winter, sometimes agreeing on a report, more often differing about details, without any chairman to give a casting vote. I can reconstruct some of the committee meetings—in part at any rate. As for instance, on Christmas day—or Boxing Morning, more strictly. It was our first Christmas in the new house, a twelve-month after that miserable one that followed my mother's death.

"I say, Gracey, I think it must be all rot."

"I don't know. . . . No!—I really don't. Why?"

"Why—look at Jemima last night."

"Well!"

"She didn't do anything."

"What did you expect her to do?"

"Why—she didn't dress up, or anything."

"Well, I thought that rather nice of her. Ellen dressed up."

"Yes, because of that ass she's engaged to. And he never came!"

"It was because of his toothache. . . . Yes—his tooth really was very bad, Jackey."

"Oh! . . . Well, what were we saying? About Jemima——"

"What were you saying about Jemima?"

"I thought Varnish had found a mare's nest about her and the Governor."

"Why?"

"Oh, very well—you don't think so——"

"Don't be a silly boy. Tell me why *you* thought so."

"Well, anybody would have thought so! Look how she kept out of the Governor's way. And what a rumpus she was making to stop our making any noise."

"I don't see what that has to do with it." And Gracey evidently didn't.

Clear as the thing had seemed to me, unentangled in language, I found I couldn't word it when challenged to do so. I can now. I meant that Miss Evans's desire that no over-festivity should grate upon my father proved her too keenly alive to the degree of his bereavement to permit of our entertaining the idea that Varnish was right. I think I answered Gracey by an unintelligible attempt to explain this, and she treated it as it deserved. I escaped into a realm of speculation about the future. "Won't she be in an awful wax when she finds it's no go!" said I, delicately. I failed to interpret Gracey's dubious expression rightly. As I now read it, the grave blue eyes and closed lips—closed against temptation to speech—of the image memory supplies, seem to be keeping back the counter-question:—"Will it be no go?"

The next committee meeting I have a vivid recollection of must have been well over four months later, for the grass was summer-dry to the feet on the lawn that committee walked on, with its arms round each other's neck—the phrase analyzes all right, if you analyze fair. And the apple-blossoms were thick on our neighbour's trees, but the pear-trees had paid their usual tribute to late April frosts, and the crop we had been at liberty to dream of three weeks since had become a mere might-have-been, in our garden. I recall Gracey and myself on the grass talking about the apples and lamenting the pears. So I suppose it was in the middle of a warm May, after a fiendish April.

Our talk ran, otherwise, on a domestic perturbation. Miss Evans, who had been for over fifteen years almost one of the family, was going to desert it inexplicably. More inexplicably now by far than if she had cried off during any of my remembered years before my mother's death. For I could well recollect the dissensions between them, especially latterly; though of course they only came within the scope of my observation imperfectly, as the inner life of his seniors is so often manifested to a boy. Since my mother's death, almost unbroken concord reigned; and, during the last few months particularly, Miss Evans's relations with every member of the family—Varnish perhaps excepted—had been perfectly satisfactory. They might be summed up as generally affectionate, the affection becoming passionate for my sister Roberta, cooling down to tolerance towards myself, and strongly imbued with grateful respect towards my father. And yet this lady had made up her mind that she must say adieu to this haven of continuous peace, assigning for her action no reason that seemed really to account for her conduct.

"Anyhow it shows we were right," said I in committee, with Gracey, after an *ad interim* lament over the pears. "Varnish was talking rot."

"Was she?" said Gracey, accepting my language, as strictly in order.

"Well—wasn't she?" said I. "Anyhow, we *were* right!"

"Don't say *we*, Jackey. Because *I* didn't say Varnish was talking rot. Perhaps she was—perhaps she wasn't."

"I knew you'd milk and water it all away. That's just like you girls."

"Silly boy! Why can you never be reasonable, Jackey, for two minutes together?"

"Well—come now—I say—look here! Would Jemima be such an ass?"

Gracey made no pretence of not understanding me. Indeed, our reciprocities in apprehension were fully up to special brother-and-sister point—a point near clairvoyance. But my speech would profit by interpretation. "You mean," said she, "would Miss Evans run away from Papa, if——"

"If she had the idea. Yes." I notice now that whenever I half think into this reconstruction of an almost forgotten past, any direct reference to bald unqualified marriage—with my father as Miss Evans's end—my memory refuses to countersign its certificate. I don't believe we ever referred to matrimony. It was among the subconsciousness of the position, at least in this com-



mittee meeting, which proceeded as follows, Gracey accepting my completion of her sentence:

"Varnish says she *won't* run away——"

"Won't run away?"

"She says we shall see."

"Of course we shall see! I could have told *her* that. But I say—look here! If Jemima means to stick on, I can't see what all the shindy's about."

"There is no shindy. Don't be such a boy!"

"I'm not—and there is a shindy. Why, you should have seen the Governor. He was in a fine stew!"

"When?"

"I was in the room when. I mean when he got Jemima's letter—eight pages on pink letter-paper—put on his table for when he came back."

"What was in it?"

"How should I know?"

"I mean—what did Papa say?"

"Oh, he *said*—well, he *said*—here was a pretty how-do-you-do! Helen was going."

"What did *you* say?"

"I said:—'Helen who?'"

"You silly boy! Who else could it have been?"

"Nobody. But I asked, for all that. . . . What did the Governor say then? He didn't say anything—read some of the letter twice over."

"And when he'd read it, what did he say *then*?"

"Oh—then he said:—'Helen Evans, inquisitorial offspring.' You know the Governor's way."

"Didn't he say anything else?"

"No—yes—he thought a minute, and then went back. Helen Evans was Helen. What did I call her? I said—Jemima, sometimes. He made me explain about J'mima Ivins in Boz."

"Then he wasn't in such a towering passion."

"I didn't say he was. I only said he was in a fine stew. . . . No—I don't consider it's at all the same thing."

"I consider it is."

"Well—it isn't! The Governor's able to be in a fine stew and not stamp and ramp like a booby."

My companionship with my father, with the free run of his room, continued—as I am reminded by my resuscitation of this interview—for a long time after this. It was a phase belonging

to boyhood, which merged later on in maturity. Its absorption implied no diminution of affection on the part of either. The only difference it made was that as time went on I saw less and less of the background of my father's life, as developed by conversation with visitors; carried on, so far as he was concerned, with entire carelessness as to whether I was listening or not. Now and then he would give me a broad hint that I was not wanted, telling me to make myself scarce till I was next in demand. He did this, rather to my surprise, on the Sunday morning following the above garden chat; saying he expected a visitor. And though I complied without remark, I spent all the time of my absence in dissatisfied speculation about the reasons of so unusual an action. And this more especially because at the moment of his suggestion that I should go—or, as he put it, trot—no visitor had come in sight.

Varnish was attending public worship in the old church, and so was Gracey. The two other sisters had gone to St. Luke's to hear the Rev. Mr. Kingsley preach. I thought Miss Evans had gone with them as usual, but I was mistaken.

After a constitutional to the old bridge—gone now!—along the old river road, changed now but there still, and so on to the gate of Cremorne Gardens and back home, my curiosity as to this visitor, audible in my father's library, became so great, that I could not resist the temptation to eavesdrop up to what I held a legitimate point, just so far as to identify the voice, if I might. There was no doubt who it was, and my mind said:—"Why—it's Jemima! I thought she was at church." The voice spoke fragmentarily—emotionally. I was so honourable that the moment I had identified it I recoiled from the door and went a needlessly long way off, to emphasize, as it were, the blamelessness of my intent. I went in fact as far as the end of the garden fence next door, but—I am thankful to say—without anticipating in the smallest degree that the conversation there would be much more audible than at the street-door. That it was so was due to the fact that the side window of the library opened on our neighbour's garden. A modest amount of casuistry was sufficient to convince me that it was honourable under these circumstances to draw inferences from the sound of voices, though I should of course retire to their vanishing point of articulation, if I detected any. It was playing with fire, but then I should tell no one but Gracey. Not even Varnish, unless indeed what I overheard made for refutation of her rot, which a less trenchant vocabulary than mine would have called her mistaken views or misapprehensions.

A nice point of conscience connected itself with Mr. Mapleson's fowls—or rather, Thomas's. Is eavesdropping practicable at all when a powerful hen is dwelling on domestic details a few yards off? Do phrases that reach one's ears, during momentary cluckful subordinations of the main theme, count as having been really overheard? I say *not*.

Anyhow, I think I was excusable for holding myself only academically aware—so to speak—of one or two fragments of speech that detached themselves audibly from the steady earnest current of the two voices that rose and fell and interlaced, or paused to begin again; renewed, as it seemed to me, with more of tension or emotion than was compatible with the complete decay of Varnish's rot. But the audible phrases were all, or almost all, spoken by my father.

"Unless you have some better reason . . ." it said, and was lost. Then a little later, petulantly:—"People say!—people say! What does it matter what people say?" Then, after an interval which Miss Evans seemed to have all to herself:—"All fanciful nonsense! If you are really happier here . . ." drowned by what seemed earnest, almost passionate, extension and confirmation of the only words I clearly caught "But I am—I am . . ." from Miss Evans. Then quick undertones for a while, almost as folk speak who suspect a hearer, and yet *must* needs risk speech in despite of him. They need not have been so supercautious, for that hen took possession of the rostrum; with the good effect of completely soothing my conscience, which was getting a little uneasy at so much overhearing. Obviously I was not listening, when, broadly speaking, nothing was or could be audible. But one always welcomes confirmation of opinion.

I walked to the garden end and back, and persuaded myself that I was interested in lilies of the valley. They palled, and my interest was transferred to some house-martens, who I think had come back to look up their last year's lodgings, and were disgusted with the smell of the fresh paint. I doubt when I saw the old house last, any swallow had built for a long time in its eaves. There was no fresh paint in question then; the London sparrow was responsible, I take it.

I could do nothing for these birds, so I went round by the side path in the garden into the drawing-room, wondering when Jemima would have done—so ran soliloquy, through a yawn. For the question was beginning to arise—should I, or should I not, get the walk to Lavender Hill and Clapham with my father that I had been promising myself? If this foolery went on—soliloquy

continued—would not the answer have to be in the negative?

Not necessarily, for Jemima's voice, still audible in the distance seemed to be drawing to a close. Soliloquy remarked, disrespectfully, that she and the Governor had had their whack, anyhow. I think, if this expression implies satiety in discussion or action, leading to a profitable result, that Miss Evans had certainly had hers. At least, I gathered as much from her expression as her eyes met mine in the drawing-room, which she entered a minute later than myself; having however opened the door just before I came in, keeping it nominally closed that no dialogue should slip through to a hearer, if any. Some came through the inch ajar, to me, nevertheless.

"Well, then, we quite understand—there's to be no more nonsense about going. You promise?"

"Yes—I promise."

"Whatever happens!"

"Yes—whatever happens!" And thereupon the door opened, and Miss Helen Evans came in with the expression on her face that I have referred to.

The scant material at the disposal of Memory after a sixty years' gap makes a vivid image of the past a thing to treasure, even when concurrent record is absent. How much more when it carries, as this image of Miss Evans does, a conviction to my mind as to the nature of that interview with my father, not borne in upon me then, but developed by maturer insight in the years that followed. I have repeated a guess-version of it to my Self fifty times, and met with scarcely any contradiction.

In it my father appears as absurdly paternal, almost affectedly so; for he was not over five-and-forty, and young of his years; while the young lady, though she may have looked young of hers, certainly had not a minute less than thirty-one to plead guilty to. It presents her—does this fancy of mine—as accepting this paternity, possibly for strategic purposes. I have no blame for her; a woman has a right to fend for herself. I can picture my father also, making a joke of the eight-page screed she had composed with such care for his perusal; saying, come now, what was the mystery?—what did it all mean?—surely we need have no secrets—we who had known each other so many years! *He knew* well enough; it was the malicious gossip of some fool of a woman, was it not? Well—forget it!—was it worth a second thought? Oh no! No one knew that better than Miss Evans. But this sort of thing was so difficult for a woman to pay no attention to,

however absurd it might be in itself. A woman was so defenceless—people would believe anything! . . . Oh yes!—it *did* matter what they believed. Only it was hard for a man to realize a woman's position. Every one would think . . . but there!—it was impossible for her to talk about it.

At this point, this puppet of my imagining shuts in a secret perturbation—closes her lips upon details it would never do to converse upon. For *them* to converse upon, that is! Thereon the other puppet, whose strings I find it easier to pull, breaks into a laugh with an encouraging tone in it, exclaiming:—"Come now!—what does it all amount to when the murder's out? Mrs. Somebody Something said you paid me the compliment of . . . Oh, very well—very well!—All right—all right! I won't say anything." I forged this, I doubt not, to suit a deprecating gesture of this lady's, familiar to me but not quite easy to describe, a rapid vibration of two very pretty hands—for her hands *were* pretty, undeniably—followed by a semi-clasp, halfway to prayer, good to express the words:—"Oh, please don't!"

My dramatic imputations have gone further than that, a great deal, sometimes speculating on the possibility of *tendresses* of manner between the puppets, but never ascribing active, loverlike behaviour. I am inclined now to credit this to a curious fancy of mine in youth, that persons I accounted grown up never made love; it was no concern of theirs! Miss Evans's expression, which went such lengths in suggestion of dramatization, conveyed no hint of kissing; and I really never had any grounds for inserting it into my text. But her face gave me plenty to build upon.

And yet—why? Not because the lips were shut close; that was her most common lip-form. Not because her eyes gleamed; they usually gleamed. Not because she was white; she very seldom flushed. So if I never come to know and I am not likely to, now—what it is that gives a triumphant look to a face, the question will remain unanswered, for me. All I can say to my Self now is that the recollection of her visible face and figure at that moment seems to convey with it a knowledge that her invisible heart was pulsating with a sense of triumph. Her voice helps it perhaps. Anyhow, she was in a good way, as the phrase runs.

"Why, you naughty young man!—fancy *your* being here still! Dear Mr. Paseoe thinks you have gone for a walk."

"Do you mean the Governor?" said I. For I never approved of this designation for him, one Miss Evans used very often.

"Oh, if you like—the Governor!" her laugh over this concession was rich and pleasant. But it rubbed my boyhood into me and



I resented that. Still, her laugh had its charm; it ran over its boundaries like the juice of a ripe peach. Really if Miss Evans had always laughed and spoken, I should have had much more Christian feeling towards her. A constant watchfulness that beset her countenance when at rest kept me in a state of subacute Paganism. Varnish hated it—was often what I lucidly described as “down upon Jemima’s mug,” and expressed her reading of it by calling its owner a “perseverin’ Cat.”

However there was nothing of this phase of Jemima as I recollect her image and its laugh in the newly furnished drawing-room, with the smell of lilac and mignonette everywhere, and a loud blackbird outside snubbing her “fledglings” impertinent remarks. It seems so odd—the way the whole thing comes back as I dwell on it! For instance, how Miss Evans spoiled the good impression of her laugh, and her vast redundancy of spring muslin dappled with a leaf-broken sun reflection from the greenhouse, by adding:—“Yes—the Governor thought you had gone for a walk. We both thought so.”

I was secretly exasperated at Jemima grouping herself, as it were, with my father. “We!”—the idea! Castor and Pollux, Gog and Magog—nay, Adam and Eve themselves!—could have said no more, unless indeed a first-person-dual existed in their day. But no protest was possible that would not have given more openings to duality. Better ignore it! “There won’t be any time now for him and me to get a walk before lunch,” said I, somewhat morosely, avoiding the pronoun Miss Evans had used, to keep aloof from her. But I was not equal to a complete dignified silence about my injury. “I thought you were never going to have done jawing,” was the form my protest took. It weakened my position. One should never be offensive. It gives the other party an opportunity, and is tactically bad.

“Oh dear,” cries Jemima, with that musical laugh again. “I *am* so sorry! I didn’t want to spoil your walk. Stop a minute!” And the young woman actually had the presumption to constitute herself an intermediary between me and my father! She ran back and tapped at his door. I could have passed her easily if she had been half as narrow as the Rev. Cuthbert Turner’s daughter, who was here with him yesterday; but in those days no one could pass a lady of the standard width, in an ordinary entrance lobby. “I *am* so sorry,” said Miss Evans again, when my father responded; “I’m afraid I’ve kept you from your walk.” I was too proud to sanction Miss Evans’s priority by playing second fiddle visibly; so I remained out of sight. I heard my father’s comment that

followed her communication about which there was too much confidential undertone for my liking. It ran:—"He's a nice young monkey! How many hours does he want to walk about Clapham Common?" However, he came out and called to me. "Pedestrian persecutor—where are you? Attention! Mind you're ready to start in five minutes." I went into the passage to say "All right!" and thought Miss Evans was much too close to him.

My only impression of that was that the young woman was taking rather a liberty. I could still have speculated unconcerned as to how great a wax she would be in when she found "it" was no go—that mysterious *it* that neither I nor Gracey nor Varnish ever gave its title to. And yet marriage, however much Grundy *père* and *mère* hocus-pocus it to keep Miss Grundy in the dark, is a word used freely by all to designate a well-known incident in fiction and the drama, but dictionary-bound about ladies and gentlemen out of harness.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE STORY

WHEN Nathaniel Pascoe came to the decision that he would take the plunge and ask Helen Evans to become his wife, he was actuated by several motives, but by no means the least of them was his desire to retain permanently such an invaluable inmate in his home as Helen was proving herself to be, and moreover give her the position that would best enable her to direct and control his family. She had played her game so dexterously in the past year that he had come to regard her as the absolute salvation of his daughters, and to feel that once bereft of her benign influence, they would undoubtedly drift into a life of wanton lawlessness. No! girls must have a mother to guide and counsel them, and who was better able to fill their dead mother's place than a clever beautiful creature like Helen, who moreover had known them all from childhood.

So that when Miss Evans played her trump card, and wrote to inform her employer that she felt forced regretfully to leave the home that had been hers for so many years! That circumstances had changed! that Mr. Pascoe was now a widower! and that it was in the nature of things that some tongues should be evil! etc. etc. . . . Mr. Pascoe, whose romantic devotion to his wife's memory had received a rude shock from the reading of that unfortunate letter of hers to her former lover, promptly determined that the only way out of the difficulty, was that the beautiful Helen Evans should become Mrs. Pascoe without further delay, and he therefore lost no time in pressing his suit.

Miss Evans after a creditable amount of surprised hesitation accepted him, and it was then and there decided that as soon as a sufficient time had elapsed to meet the exigencies of propriety they should be married very quietly without taking any of the family into their confidence.

So in due course of time it was arranged that Miss Evans should pay a visit to her married sister at Tooting, merely telling her pupils that she was going for a week or ten days' holiday. The marriage could then take place from her sister's house, and Mr.

Pascoe, who had timed things to fit in with his Easter vacation, drove off alone early one morning in April, got married and returned with his bride in time for lunch, when the unwelcome news was broken to the assembled family. Now though the idea of their father's marrying Miss Evans had been discussed by the girls as a possible nightmare in the future, they were totally unprepared for the reality when it was burst upon them, and they found that the dreaded marriage had actually taken place.

Gracey and Ellen were sullen and resentful, but Roberta though she was the one her father had looked to to welcome Helen as his bride, simply refused to speak to her. In vain Mr. Pascoe fetched a bottle of champagne from the cellar and tried to be hilarious, they would not thaw. Perhaps had Eustace John been there things might have been easier, but he was out for the day with Cooky, and the happy pair were undisguisedly relieved when at three o'clock the brougham came round to take them to the station, and they departed for their short honeymoon at Folkestone.

In the dusk of that chilly spring evening Varnish sat by the fire in her own sanctum; at her feet sat Roberta her head resting on her old nurse's knee. Roberta had been crying, and Varnish made no attempt at consoling her, on the contrary she enlarged upon the cause of her unhappiness. "Your poor dear ma! and she dead and buried! and that not eighteen months ago!"

"Oh, Varnish, Varnish, it is all too dreadful," sobbed Roberta.

"It is what she has been plotting and scheming for all these past months; I have watched her at it," continued Varnish, "but I never thought your pa would be took in so easy like. I never did take to her, Miss Roberta, not even when she just come, and you were all small. I said to myself that's a hussy if ever there was one, and mark my words, darling, there always has been a summat queer about her, I am sure at the time your poor ma was took, she was that unnatural, not that I could give it a name so to speak, but I sort of felt her queer about it all."

"Do you think then," said Roberta, "that she began plotting all this immediately? I mean as soon as ever Mamma was gone."

"Who can say," answered the old nurse, "nor for the matter of that who can say but what she may have looked forward to summat of the sort, long afore your poor dear ma took the poison."

Roberta gave a sudden start and turning sharply round looked up into Varnish's face, and said almost in a whisper:

"You know, Varnish dear, Helen *did* go into Mamma's room that awful night, just before we started for the theatricals. I am

positively certain she did, though she told me she only just put her head in at the door. Mamma sent me to tell her to come, and she would never have let her keep the door open while she talked to her, it was such a cold night, besides; the bed was ever so far from the door, she must have gone into the room, or she could not have heard what Mamma had to say to her. And I'll tell you what, Varnish," continued Roberta with a quick flash of vehement insight, "she knew about that overdose, I am sure she did! And she never told! Mamma might have been saved had the doctor been sent for in time! And she knows it, and talks about poison bottles in her sleep! And now!!"

"Hush, hush, my pretty," said Varnish with a startled scared look on her wrinkled face. "Remember, darling, she has married your pa!"



## CHAPTER XX

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

THE evening of the day the bride and bridegroom returned from their short honeymoon my father looked so much like himself, when I entered his library, that I could have easily given way to the fancy which stirred in my mind that none of the past two years was reality, but only dream—dream to be waked from with joyful alacrity. Especially Jemima, said a sub-conscious postscript, in an undertone.

The two glazed bookcases which had nearly baffled Satterthwaite, so much were they out of scale with The Retreat, would have had all the force of Mecklenburg Square, if they had touched the ceiling less uncomfortably. There, at the Square, a two-foot margin would have given Tom Thumb room to stand upright. Here, a cat could not have wedged herself into the concealed space that was looking forward to undisturbed dust until the expiration of our lease. Otherwise, they made the same background to the same Governor as in the old days of the Square, two years since. His chair, table, lamp, cabinet with nests of drawers with a lock-up to each—nests from which no drawer ever took flight—were all the very same, only nearer together. They hardly looked at home yet then, but they must have forgotten the Square by the time The Retreat came to an end, long years after.

What bid highest for the dream interpretation was my father's pipe. Its aroma was so intensely the same as in the old days, that when I closed the door I had entered by, I could have ascribed my own alacrity in doing so to my mother's edicts against the escape of smoke into the passage; the traditions of which my father revered, for her sake. I recollect cancelling a proposed thought in my brain at that moment, touching Jemima's probable attitude towards tobacco. If she approved it, would its limitation to my father's sanctum lapse naturally, or would he stick to it as a memorial usage, a tribute to the past?

"Come along in, Jackey boy," said he. "Come in and forgive your father." I had done that, to my thinking, but I supposed he wanted ratification. My going straight to sit on his knee served this turn. There could be no reserve of unforgiveness behind

that. I was embarrassed nevertheless, and he did nothing to relieve my embarrassment by saying:—"Well!—And what then?"

I took advantage of the ambiguity of this question. Surely it left the determination of its subject to me.

"I say," said I, "where do you think we went? We went all over by Willesden and round by Wembley, and if we had only had another hour we could have got to Pinner, and been back in time for grub." I felt the irrelevancy of this information even as its words passed my lips.

"That was glorious!" said my father. But I could see that he was not deeply involved in topographical comparisons as he went on:—"Let's see!—where did we go? Round by Willesden, and over by . . . where was it——?"

"Wembley. And we really could have gone on to Pinner, if only we hadn't had to be back for dinner at half-past-seven!" All our records of these walks-out were framed to tax human credulity.

"Poor old Jackey!" said my father, with true commiseration in eyes I seem to see as I write. "We were back for dinner at half-past-seven, and found a new stepmother on the premises. Strange sort of wild beast, eh?"

The discovery of any form of language to grapple with the subject was quite beyond me. I could only nod—a long nod, not a short one—leaving my eyes fixed on my father till further notice.

"And which was it, beastly?—or awful?"

I submitted to the implied criticism of a style which I now see has its faults, and shook my head firmly and continuously, behind closed lips. I was ready to go great lengths in white-washing my father—would have tried for it had he brought home a cartload of brides—but I preferred to veil that readiness in mystery as to its details.

"Your sister Gracey," he went on, using the form of speech he always preferred, for some reason unknown to me, "your sister Gracey seems to be inclining towards a more lenient view of the culprits. One of them, at any rate!"

"She means *you*, of course!" I said. "She's not such a beastly fool as Bert!" I was rapidly taking sides with my father.

Perhaps he would have done better to leave me to the natural course of development. But I think he felt that my attitude towards my other sisters was too drastic. "Jackey boy," said he, gently—almost apologetically—as his fingers made chance rearrangements of my unruly head of hair:—"Remember what it is the girls are thinking of. Don't let us be hard on them!"

"What *are* they thinking of?" I was really asking for information, while maintaining a collateral contempt for girls, chiefly sisters.

His reply was simply:—"They are thinking of your mamma."

It *was* very daring. The living die every day, and are dust. But they are not to be spoken of too soon. They must be laid-up for awhile, to give decorum breathing-time. Analysis of their faults will wait, and a time will come when even their next of kin will be philosophical over their extinction. But a decade is wanted for this—it is quite the lowest figure the Correctitudes will accept. That visit to Highgate Cemetery was not yet two years old.

I feel now horribly ashamed of my question that followed, which seems to me, look at it how I may, no better than crude brutality. I was not conscious of any want of feeling then—only of a burning thirst for an answer to it. I began it tentatively:—"I say, Gov——" and wavered back into an awkward silence, checked by a sudden suspicion that I might be transgressing rules. I had so often broken through imperative ones before now, through ignorance of their existence.

"What do you say, importunate interrogator?" The hand that was caressing my face felt cool and collected, so far as its touch could register its owner's feelings. I feel sure he had no idea what was coming.

"What *would* Mamma say?" I thought for one short moment that I had hurt or offended him, so quickly did he withdraw his hand. But I was wrong, as far as offence went, at any rate. For it was back again as before a moment after, having just covered his eyes and brow during that moment, as though some sudden pain had shot through them.

And he was repeating my question. "What would Mamma say?—what *would* Mamma say? Quite right, Jackey boy! Good boy to ask! . . . No, no—don't run away!" I remember his words more clearly than the movement on my part that had occasioned them. He went on, dreamily:—"Why should I not tell my boy? Only, need I?—need I?" I am certain that he was not alive to the way I was absorbing his words—as little as to my retention of them in the years to come. Sixty years now—just think of it!

His words that followed are what I have been feeling so solicitous about; solicitous, that is, that my powers of memory should not flag at a critical moment, and make my record of them barren. These are what I heard—these I am about to write. I *may* have unconsciously added some word I knew he meant; but, if so, my conviction of it must have been indeed a strong one. I have

more faith in it than in my record-power, at the end of such an almost geological period.

"Let us talk about Mamma, Jackey boy. Why should we not, my boy and I? Listen, Jackey! 'What would Mamma say?'—that was your question?" I nodded an unequivocal affirmative. "Shall I tell you what Mamma would say?" I nodded again. "She would say *nothing*. If your mamma were here, and I could see her and hear her voice, and the whole of life could be as it was . . . Yes!—the *whole*—the *whole*! Back in the old house . . . with the old ways . . . and the misery unknown——!" His voice shook under the stress of old memories revived, the clash of by-gone time with our own; and I, being a mere crude boy, was as much alive to my own objection to emotion, which was very strong, as to its demand for human sympathy. I did not see in his speech something I see plainly now. He seemed to make an effort towards a completer self-control, repeating his own words quickly:—"If your mamma were here and I could see her and hear her voice . . . Why—what would there be for her to say anything about? We should all be back again, like old times, eh—Jackey boy!" I think he wanted me to receive the idea, without elaborate explanation, that hypotheses cut both ways—are edged tools to play with. He ended, a moment after, with:—"I have turned Miss Evans into Mrs. Pascoe *because* your mamma can know nothing about it, as one day, dear boy, we too shall know nothing. The wind will blow, and the sun will shine, but *we* shall know nothing. No—neither pleasure nor pain, light nor darkness. We shall pass away as others have passed away from us, and know no more than they know now."

I have always thought the better of my father, and revered him more, that he had the courage to speak so plainly about his own views of Death. Should I love his memory more if it presented him to me as the preacher of a vague hereafter he had no belief in? Surely not. But he had never interposed between me and the precept and example of others, for he stood alone in his Sadducism, and was condemned by my mother and elder sisters for it; while Gracey had communicated to me, in secret conclave, her view that Papa was not in earnest. So that in my immature mind the tenets of the current Orthodoxies were not unrepresented, and even my disposition to condemn them broadly as rot—out of respect for him—did not seem to warrant my acceptance of an entire condemnation of them without a protest.

It took form after some moments of silence, in which I decided that I could not refer to my mother's faith; that Ellen's and Bertie's

were valueless; and that Gracey was still juvenile to quote as an authority. I began hesitatingly:—"Varnish says——"

"What does Varnish say, Solemn Jackey?" said he, pinching my cheek and making me feel too young to go on.

But I screwed up my courage, and selected from among a considerable variety of views of the state of the Departed held, or professed, by my authority, a good, round, satisfactory one no survivor could reject on its merits.

"Varnish says Mamma's an angel," said I, bluntly.

"And Varnish knows," said my father. "How does Varnish know?"

"She says the Bible says so." I don't know that I had ever actually heard this from Varnish, but it sounded right.

"The Bible says so many things," said my father, drily. "Some are much more improbable than that your mamma is an Angel. But listen to this, Jackey, and bring your powerful mind to understand it, old man. If your mamma is an angel, and can see us here now, I *know* she would not be happy to see Helen Evans go away from her girls, and leave them alone, after being with them so many years."

I know that my response to this was crude and coarse, but it was to the point. "Why wasn't Jemima to stick on without any marrying?" And, indeed, as Jemima had "stuck on" for the last eighteen months, the question did seem to arise.

My father only smiled benignantly. "There are more little niceties in Heaven and earth, Master Jackey," said he, "than are dreamed of in your philosophy. Suppose we consider that I know best, about that!"

"All right!" said I, with generous complacency.

"Suppose we do! And, my dear boy, there's this." His voice fell to a greater seriousness. "There's a thing I want you to bear in mind. Promise me you will. I mean promise you will remember what I am going to say to you." I expressed my readiness to do so, or indeed anything else, and he continued:—"Some of these days, when you are a man, and I'm not a man any longer,—which will also come about some of these days, quite naturally—if ever it crosses your mind that your Governor's behaviour seemed unaccountable . . . Understand——?"

"All right!"

"Don't run away with the idea that I had not some good reason for what I did. Now, that's difficult. Sure you understand it?"

I was absolutely sure that I understood it; much surer than I am now that some of the foregoing conversation has not been invented



by Memory to accommodate Probability. She has her complacent as well as her contradictory fits. If one of the former should prompt her to revive any more of it, I will write it in, in its place. There must have been more, for I remember plainly that when I left my father, my sisters and the bone of contention were lighting bedroom candles outside in the passage, with a parade of mutual courtesy quite foreign to current usage at that date. It was less than an hour after dinner when I closed the library door behind me so quickly, to shut in the smoke.

I suppose it was what writers of fiction call the "irony of Fate" that Roberta, whose affection for Miss Evans had been regarded by us all as an unchangeable institution—like the Equator, or Sunday—was the fiercest of the whole family in her resentment of her stepmother.

My sister Ellen and myself at least were quite ready to manifest a grudging cordiality. My own was far the warmer of the two, being based on a bedrock of faith in my father, while Ellen's was little more than a version of her usual objection to any decided form of action, or active form of decision. "What is the use of fuss?" was a question she often asked, and never got any satisfactory answer to, although many are obvious. Gracey was merely quiet and frightened throughout, not going far away from Varnish; evidently feeling her protection, and perhaps also regarding her as a person used to marriages, and capable of dealing with them. I suspect this, because I had a similar feeling myself.

I suppose it was at about this time of my life that it occurred to me to look at my sisters critically. Ellen soft-haired, pretty, violet-eyes; blue-veined on a tender skin; irresolute lips their owner would not leave to assert themselves as an intelligible mouth, but would perversely hold between very pearly teeth, or manipulate out of all reason with a tender finger and thumb. For her hands were uncommonly pretty without a doubt. But she had never made good the defect my mother complained of so strongly, that in spite of her own example in youth, her daughter had not—to borrow my father's phrase—filled out. She remained figureless, but—said professional skill—easy enough to fit when backed by secret artifices. My brutal boyhood discerned in these underlying abominations a reason why Ellen's lovers wore out at a certain stage of courtship, that stage occurring at or soon after the time when its maturity permitted or demanded *tendresses* of a nature to detect them. I may write what amuses me, and it amuses me now—and saves further delicacy—to put on record words I used myself, to describe contingencies of the situation. "If she goes crack

or scratches," I said, "he knows it isn't her." This was to Gracey's ears alone. She nodded a thoughtful assent.

Then as to my image of Bertie. I had never recognized the fact that she was handsome—if I tie myself to an exact date—until she turned upon the treacherous Jemima,—on the occasion, I mean, of Miss Evans's first appearance as Mrs. Pascoe; I fancy I may have referred to it—but I remember her white anger seemed to turn her hair black, and it became her. I know I remarked to Gracey that Bert was in an awful wax. Possibly the awful wax sat well upon her—brought out her good points. For it certainly dawned upon me for the first time, at that moment, that I had a handsome sister. It was a moment—no more—but when I coax the image back to me, by thought of the time and its surroundings, it is vivid still.

I fancy now that that old grandmother of mine,—the Old Spitfire,—when she was young and George the Third was King, carried herself erect and flashed, like a slightly more truculent Roberta. I remember a black silhouette of her, over the dining-room chimney-piece at Highbury, which looked as though she was measuring, back to back, against a great-aunt in the same frame. Each was trying to shoot up the tortoise shell comb her knot owed its station in life to, as high as possible; and each had the longest possible neck, and the shortest possible waist. As I recall Bert's uncompromising demeanour now, it brings back to me those silhouettes, though I don't know that I ever connected them with her before. Of course it must have been the Spitfire from whom she inherited. Why was the strain in abeyance through one generation, to reappear in the next? My mother must have been like her father, or an entirely new departure on her own account.

But she was handsome, this dark sister of mine. I cannot write that she was beautiful, because the word does not ring true. I cannot apply the word to a girl whose knuckles interfere with my recollection of her hand, and whose bone-distances assert themselves in my memory of her after all else has vanished, like the smile of Alice's Cheshire cat. I think her individualities and Ellen's quarrelled, to the advantage of neither, and they were best apart. I did not at all agree with a Mrs. Walkinshaw, who used to visit us about this time, and who was all soul. "Dear Ellen"—she would moan—"is Elaine; and dear Roberta is Joan of Arc. They bring each other out." She repeated this whenever she saw them, but I can find no fault with her on that score, for she confessed, and disarmed censure. "I always *did* say so, and I always *shall* say so," came as a sort of recitative. That, however, was not

what I wanted to kick her for. I did, and what provoked me was her postscript about Gracey, who had to be worked in somehow, although she limped. Mrs. Walkinshaw would suddenly recollect this, and pounce on her with what Gracey called treachery violence, and a sort of expansive gush, exclaiming:—"And he-ee-ere is my little interesting Gracey!" She had better have left Gracey out, as the reason of the word interesting—a very limited word—was that limp. Gracey was a damaged article.

I think I was well alive to all this at about the time of my father's marriage, having more or less regarded my elder sisters as merely samples of their class, with no qualities to speak of. I think his marriage directed my attention to Human Nature, meaning thereby that very large department in it which determines the relations of the two sexes, or upsets them. I had ignored this, with a liberal application of the epithets Ass, Idiot, Booby, and Fool to victims of the Tender Passion. That expresses my attitude towards such cases in this department as had been brought to my notice at this date. The conversion of Jemima to my stepmother must have done much to convince me that Love and Matrimony, or either alone without the other, were forces to be reckoned with. It may easily have been this new consciousness that made me reflect more seriously than I might have done before it germinated, on the constant reference in my sister's conversation to Anderson Grayper.

He was the young man who had played Charles to Bertie's Maria at the Hazels at Roehampton, two years before, and whom I had dismissed from my mind as a friend of Bertie's on the many occasions when he had turned up as a visitor at The Retreat; sometimes uninvited, with an inadequate pretext. This was all very well so long as I regarded the *entichements* of young persons of opposite sexes as, broadly speaking, tomfoolery. But a new light had reached my mind. Roused by a painful experience of what might ensue in the case of a mature lady and gentleman, I became alive to possibilities in the bush in the case, even of my own sisters.

Still, so deeply penetrated was I with a peculiar view of the attractions my sisters possessed for unattached mankind—so convinced that no arrow would ever leave Cupid's quiver on *their* behalf—that I stifled a suspicion that rankled in my mind in connection with the long survival of a common interest in the Drama, which certainly made this Charles dance attendance on this Maria much longer than any *belle lettre* seemed to warrant. It might have remained a suspicion until the climax came, if it

had not been for a conversation I remember well enough with my dear schoolboy friend, Cooky, otherwise Nebuchadnezzar. Its date must have been about a couple of months after the establishment of Miss Evans as Mrs. Pascoe, as we were in the garden after dinner, and he and I had our jackets off by preference, for coolness' sake. This sort of thing is usually well after midsummer in England.

"You didn't understand what I meant, little Buttons," he had said, referring to an Italian word he had used.

"Oh yes, I did!" said I. "Because of the way you said it. Besides, there was *amor* in the middle of it. Amor amor amorem amoris amori amore amores amores——"

"That'll do," said Cooky. "Well—what *did* I mean?"

"Meant they were spooney, I suppose. In love. That sort of thing!" I am sure I infused contempt into this.

"Exactly that sort of thing," said he. "Amores amorum amoribus amoribus." I suppose Cooky felt that after all it was hardly fair to leave a deserving substantive half declined.

I hastened to exonerate myself from any suspicion of inexperience. "Of course, I thought they were going it, *ever* so long ago!" said I, endeavouring to speak with the maturity of a worldling. It was pretence, on my part.

"That's it, little Buttons. Ever so long. So now you know."

"Oh yes!" said I, anxious to maintain my character. "They've been going it like one o'clock this evening, anyhow."

Cooky detected a movement on my part towards observation of what was going on now. "I say, little Buttons, none of that!" said he, bringing me back to my position, in which the suggestions of endearments could not be verified. "Peeping's not fair play."

"Not when it's only sisters?" said I.

"Not even when it's sisters!" said he. "What do you think Ruth would say if she caught me——?" But such espionage was too disgraceful to be put into words, and Cooky stopped short. Young Israel was, I knew, alive to the beauty of Ruth, who resembled her handsome brother, and presumably had tête-à-têtes that warranted him in ending his sentence—"I always cough, or fiddle with the handle of the door." Which quite explained itself, to me.

I think some consciousness of the part this garden had played, a twelvemonth past, as the scene of the ratification of my father's treaty with Miss Evans, must have made my crude mind receptive of my maturer friend's enlightenments, for my next words

showed how they had fructified. "Won't he sneak off?" said I. I had appreciated the position.

"Why should he?" said Cooky.

"Ellen's did," was my convincing reply. However, my sense of justice was ready with a qualification:—"But then *his* boots were prunella!"

"See what you've got to be thankful for, little Buttons! You might have had a brother-in-law with prunella boots."

"Not by now."

"Yes, by now, this very minute! With prunella boots."

"What rot! Ellen isn't old enough." This was sheer fraternity on my part, as Ellen was over twenty. But brothers stint mature years to sisters. Have they not known them in the nursery?

Cooky seemed to be seeking for some landmark in the wilderness of Time to fix Ellen's age by. "You *said*," said he, thoughtfully, "that Gracey was nearly sixteen. *She* says quite."

"Her birthday's just coming," I explained. "Ellen's two years older than Bert, and Bert's two years older than Gracey. And two bits to each go—a bit apiece." This was luminous, I suppose, as Cooky understood it.

"Making Miss Ellen five years older than Gracey," said he. For Ellen was always Miss Ellen, and Bert Miss Roberta, as neither had sanctioned Christian naming.

"Thereabouts!" said I, and we chewed the end of our reflections on this point, till a thought crossed my mind which made me break the silence. "I say, Cooky——" I began.

"Go it, little Buttons!" said he.

"You don't mean to say that in five years' time Gracey will be old enough to go getting married!"

"My old sister Rachel was less than eighteen when she went and got married. Then, of course, *she* didn't matter!"

"You mean we should care if it was Gracey."

"Well—yes—I suppose that was what I did mean." My memory of Cooky's words ascribes a sort of constrained manner to him, a change from his easy chat of a minute since. It is an odd trick of my mind that it refuses to recall that his manner produced on me then any impression akin to this recollection of it, now.

Instead, I seem to look back on a crude boy, who sees and understands only the baldest and most palpable facts; and who says, after a moment's thought:—"Couldn't he be kept out of it?"

"Who be kept out of it?"



"Him. Her him. Everybody could do without *him*. Who wants *him* in?"

Instead of replying as I, or that boy that I was, would have had him reply:—"Nobody, that I know of!" Cooky answered with gravity: "Gracey's husband. No—he couldn't be kept out of it." And his gravity remained on him, becoming taciturnity, and making stillness of his closed lips resemble Amun-ra. Our talk had somehow stopped with a jerk, and had left me listening to the undertones of my sister and her sweetheart, just too remote to allow any of their articulate speech to be forced upon me, which was what my idle curiosity wanted.

If any one were to read this, would he, I wonder, discern in it the relation in which my sister, her brother, and his friend, stood to one another? I cannot describe it to my Self otherwise than as The Club, which was our way of referring to it sometimes. It was accepted in that sense by members of the family; by Varnish, for instance, who spoke of it collectively as "you and Miss Gracey and Master Moss." My father also would refer to us as "the three of you" or as "you two young heretics and Nebuchadnezzar." He laid stress on this imputed heresy of the Christian members of The Club by referring to its possible guests suggestively, as thus:—"Get some of the Turks and Infidels from over the way to come and sing tunes." I am not sure of the exact occasion of this speech, but I am of its application. It referred to the Illingworths, who lived opposite, and were naturally spoken of as the Shillingsworths in my family. Two of them were musical enough to supply S and B in the Mendelssohn quartets in which Gracey and Cooky were respectively A and T. I used to believe in their singing, as a musical achievement; and, so far as I can retain a belief by choice, this one is mine still. And who is the worse, because an old cripple in a workhouse infirmary conceives that voices of nigh sixty years ago sang right, that like enough sang wrong, or very crudely at the best?

If I had caught any word of what my sister and Anderson Grayper were dropping their voices to say among those rustling leaves in that vanished garden, where, as I write now, some new flat with every modern convenience is running riot, it might have turned my outraged mind from that intrusion of Gracey's imaginary husband within the sacred precincts of the Club. But not a syllable reached my ears, and the only idea I received from their rapid passionate undertones was that a quarrel was brewing. Something was brewing, as I came to know later, but not

a quarrel. I went back on my resentment against any indeterminate brother-in-law.

"If he shoves himself in," said I, carrying on the talk, which had lulled, "I shan't be able to stand it. Should you, now? Supposing you were me, I mean?"

Cooky looked more than ever like Amun-ra, as he delayed his answer. It came at last. "You will *have* to stand it, little Buttons, whether you like it or no."

What I said next convinces me that boys are things *sui generis*, a strange class apart, or else that I was unlike most other samples. I incline to the former belief. "I say, Cooky," I began, "I've got such a jolly idea!"

I don't think Amun-ra saw what was coming. Indeed, the way his face relaxed—for the moment stayed with me, and I can see him, almost, now—spoke of relief at a welcome change of topic. "What's the next article?" said he, borrowing a metaphor from commerce. "Go ahead! Fire away! Don't bottle up!" I suppose he saw, in my speaking countenance, an aftermath of hesitation which I now remember, or can easily feel convinced of. For he thought it necessary to add, encouragingly:—"What's the jolly idea?" I think he thought it related to walks, or chess, or cricket.

"Why shouldn't you and Gracey get married?"

Never have I seen such a blaze of red flash suddenly over a human face as the one that covered Cooky's, even to the roots of his rich crop of black hair. He caught me by my trouser-band—for I had repudiated even my waistcoat, from the heat—and pulled me back on his knee, clapping his open hand on my mouth, to silence me. "*Hush*, little Buttons!" was his admonition, none the less telling for his suppression of voice to utter it.

"I didn't mean now directly, you know," I said, forcing my words through a freed corner of my mouth, against the palm of his hand. "I meant some of these days, when you are both grown up."

His hand closed tighter on the freed corner, quashing further elucidation. "Promise to shut up!" said he, "and then I'll take my hand off."

My reply was as nearly "All right!" as those words can be uttered, through lips compulsorily closed. The first half of the letter *n* is of little service in such a case. I helped it with nods, and the gag came off.

"Now mind you keep your promise," said Cooky.

"Never to——?" I began, and was stopped by the fact

that I could not recite the terms of the compact without breaking it.

"Exactly," said Cooky. "Never to. You've promised never to; so mind you don't!"

It was not in human nature to shut up absolutely without reserve, in obedience to a pledge so given. Besides, inquiry into the reasons for silence was not incompatible with its observance. I could not resist the temptation to transgress. "But what for?" said I, naively. "*Why* mustn't I?"

"Shut up till you're older, little Buttons," was the reply. And as the deep flush Memory recalled on the speaker's face gives place to pallor as he revives these words, I infer that the boy I was took note of it at the time, and wondered. And my wonder leads to nothing, for I remember no more—at least, of anything akin to its later topic. That vanished, to be recalled years after, when I became alive to its meaning. I had to shut up till I was older, and no event had worked on my understanding to open it.

Perhaps the sequel of my sister's interview with Mr. Grayper, which I had classified as "going it like one o'clock," was what brought my wonder at Cooky's sudden changes of complexion, and his silence that followed, to an end, abruptly. For in that silence I caught articulate words, supplying a clue to their own audibility. Roberta was saying:—"No—those boys have gone, and you needn't fuss. How nervous and ridiculous you men are, about everything! . . . Well—suppose they did, what does it matter?" Then the young man's voice, only a husky murmur. Then Roberta again, impatiently:—"Don't be didactic! The simple question is—are you willing to run the risk?"

I conceived that this had reference to some theatrical scheme, and that the parties had ceased to "go it" in any tender or passionate sense. What sort of moony imbecility, derived from fiction or the stage, I ascribed to the human lover and his lass at this time, Heaven only knows; but I am certain that if I had formulated a sample, it would have gone far to justify my belief that the victims of Cupid's darts were Awful Fools. I felt uninterested—had no desire to eaves-drop. Indeed, when Cooky whispered to me:—"They think we've gone. Suppose we hook it?" I assented without a protest. We hooked it, and I rushed upstairs to put my head in cold water and smooth myself out for Society.

So long ago, and all the memories are dim! But flashes come, and one shows me a moonlight group, visible from my open win-

dow over the stables, of two persons, who do not interest me, locked in each other's arms, where they must certainly have arrived with the suddenness of torrents from a mountain source, as described by Tennyson and read by all of us. So Cooky's insight into the position had been shrewder than mine, and it was well that it—whatever it was—had been hooked.

Nevertheless, when I rejoined Society, straightened out, I was deeply impressed with the effrontery of that couple, who were ignoring one another at different ends of the drawing-room, the gentleman's being the end nearest to the lady's stepmother.

Did I, or did I not, anticipate what followed? I think not so far as concerns my sister Roberta's marriage. I appreciated the position, as I have said, but without anticipation of any substantial result. So far as I reflected on the subject, surmise was in favour of Anderson Grayper sneaking off, as Mr. Wickham had done. That hot evening in The Retreat garden was responsible for my honouring the subject with any reflections at all.

But I am quite certain that the signs of perturbation in Cooky's face and manner produced no impression on me at the time. I was to be puzzled with my own stupidity at not interpreting them right, later on.

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## CHAPTER XXI

### THE STORY

THAT year the uncertain climate vouchsafed to these islands was at its best, and the opening days of June brought with them a burst of real summer.

Helen Pascoe lay stretched at full length on a deck chair in the garden, at The Retreat. She was exquisitely dressed and she smiled to herself as she opened her pretty lace covered parasol to shade her eyes from the glare of the afternoon sun. "Yes, on the whole, she had played her cards well!" And her thoughts travelled back over the weeks that had elapsed since she and her husband had returned from their honeymoon.

Eustace John had been skilfully managed by his father, and in consequence seemed rather proud of his self-imposed rôle of champion of Jemima. Ellen and Roberta were still undeniably hostile in their attitude to their stepmother, especially the latter. Gracey was not so bad. Varnish, Helen disliked and feared, but she knew it would be hopeless, not to say perhaps dangerous, to attempt to get rid of her—she had been far too long a family institution for that. Besides, it was always safer to let sleeping dogs lie, and in this particular case the dog had no teeth to bite with, so there was really nothing to be uneasy about—Varnish could not hurt her!

During the past few weeks the newly married couple had dined out a good deal. The invitations at first given somewhat tentatively by a few very old friends of Mr. Pascoe's, who felt they really must do the civil thing and ask them, soon took on a different complexion. The beautiful bride with her conciliatory, though dignified manner, and her distinguished appearance, did not lend herself to adverse criticism, and she easily took her place in the society to which her husband belonged, while she lost no opportunity of extending the circle of their acquaintance. Soon there would be return dinners to be given, and Helen lay dreaming of anticipated social triumphs.

As for the girls! Why, Ellen and Roberta would be sure to marry, they would not be in her way for long! They both had lovers already. Gracey, the youngest, was by far the most amiably



disposed towards her, and would no doubt be quite all right if her sisters were out of the way. Of course, she was far less likely to marry than the others on account of that limp, but then she might be made very useful in the house and save Helen trouble! No, the prospect for the future was none so bad when you looked at it all round! And Helen smiled again to herself.

Have you ever, you who read this story, watched the sun shining and glinting on the unruffled surface of a deep pool? And have you ever reflected that if your eye could pierce down into the deep depths of that blue, still water, what hidden horrors you would find there. Just for once, take your microscope and study the conditions of aquatic or insect life, and you will find it a hideous record of life and death struggles, of murder, and ceaseless strife. Yet that invisible world, seething with all the dire cruelty of which nature is capable, lies concealed under that smiling surface of water, reflecting the serene beauty of the midday sky.

Five o'clock came, and with it the servant bearing the tea-tray. Tea was to be in the garden on that lovely day, so the table was spread and the chairs brought out.

"Where are the young ladies?" asked Helen of the maid. "Tell them that tea is ready."

"Miss Ellen and Miss Gracey have been out all the afternoon; they have not come in yet, but Miss Roberta is in the garden."

What was there in this simple statement that it should make Mrs. Pascoe start so? The parasol fell from her hand in her confusion, knocking over a tea cup and breaking it into a dozen pieces. Why, she had thought she was quite alone! and she cast an almost terrified glance round the garden.

Yes, sure enough, at the far end of the lawn was the shimmer of Roberta's white dress, and from among the rose bushes peered a pair of burning dark eyes fixed intently upon her. Yes, there was Roberta watching her every movement, and seeking to pierce her innermost thoughts, and Helen shuddered, and turned sick!

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

Most people of my age, who had embarked on an undertaking to write all their recollections, would be able to get some stimulus and help and confirmation from the memory of others. I cannot. All my contemporaries of that date are dead, or dead to me, and I have only my Self to refer to.

I have made many inquiries in that quarter, without result, as to the relations of my father with his family connections at Highbury at the time of his second marriage and subsequently. I have tried to prevent my Self indulging in guesswork, but I doubt if I have succeeded. I suspect that some portion of the images my mind forms of that past are due to my Self alone, and have no foundation in fact. I must accept them now, as they stand, for I only get bewildered when I try to distinguish the false from the true.

I am, however, convinced that I knew more than any of the others about what was going on, except perhaps Gracey. I ascribe this to my position as a student. Why a schoolboy, even if he is "doing" the *Epistles of Horace*, should be supposed not to be paying attention to what goes on close at hand, I do not know. But it was an accepted view of things, or seemed to be, seen by the light of my experience. My father and his new partner always regarded me, I am sure, as too deep in the Classics to overhear chance conversation about what did not concern me. I might not have done so if they had never shown their consciousness of my presence; but when they desired secrecy, they dropped their voices. And I, being human, listened against my will! Of course, I did so under a covenant with Space, to stop listening as soon as I heard something I was not meant to know.

Said Miss Evans—as I prefer to call her, seeing that I never succeeded in thinking of her as Mrs. Pascoe, and I cannot well speak of her as "the woman my father married," every time I mention her—one evening when my father was enjoying his pipe in her company, and I was deep in Julius Florus at the table near the window:—"I feel as if it were all my fault."

Said my father, who had been reading a letter backwards and

forwards, as one reads letters that perplex or annoy:—"Stuff and nonsense, my love! What had you to do with the Settlement?"

I saw Miss Evans as she replied, so I suppose I looked round at her. Her answer was:—"It's a feeling—no more." Her face was reposeful, with dropped eyelids and still lips just apart, as she stood watching the fire blaze in earnest, for this must have been November at least. Her rich throat was in evidence, for she wore her chin a little raised. A diamond ring I knew my father had given her flashed in the firelight, and made me savage. I am satisfied now that my fits of resentment against Helen Evans were quite unreasonable, for if I ever knew anything against her, it came to my knowledge later—years later. And even as I pen these words, the doubt crosses my mind whether I am the right person to cast a stone. For there are other reasons for withholding censure than the mere fact that one cannot plead not guilty to a like indictment. I may live to write the explanation of this in its proper place, but I can scarcely promise it in view of the doctor's last visit to me, and the long face he pulled over his auscultation, yesterday.

Let me get my father's answer written. "A feeling without a foundation. A perfectly groundless feeling! For look you!—how many years was that blessed Settlement made before you turned up; you and your hair trunk? Over ten years, because Ellen was eight."

"Are you sure Mr. Wigram's——?"

"Accusations?"

"Well—accusations. I suppose they are. Are you sure they have anything whatever to do with the Settlement?"

"Yes—certainly! At least, in this sense—that if it had not been for the Settlement, Uncle Frank and I would have remained the best of friends to this day. Sure of it!"

"But it seems too unreasonable——"

"Nothing is too unreasonable for a lawyer who is a Trustee of his sister's marriage settlement. It poisons his mind, and makes him perfectly unscrupulous as to what he says against the—against the culprit."

"Meaning, the——" I don't believe I looked round at this point. The image of the speaker, puzzled, which comes back to me, was due to the tone of her words.

"Meaning me," said my father, "when it's me—meaning him, when it's him. Meaning the male factor in the concern, and treating him as a malefactor." He paused a moment to tap out

the ash from his pipe, then added:—"I see that's a pun, now it's too late. Never mind!"

Said Miss Evans then, with a wrench in her voice:—"But it's such a *horrible* accusation to bring, if he means it." She intended this for my father's hearing only, but the wrench brought her voice outside her intention. I affected to be absorbed in Julius Florus, and, indeed, went the length of looking out *verna* in Ainsworth, to convince myself that I was not listening. Any one who cares to look up the passage can find, without any tax on his latinity, that I was not getting on very fast. Certainly it was difficult to make out without a crib; but then I was translating it all wrong, so that goes for nothing.

My father repeated his wife's last words, with a serious stress on them. "*If* he means it. But he does not mean it, in the ordinary sense. His feelings towards me are, quite unconsciously to himself, created by the insidious nature of his Trusteeship. Can any one seriously suppose that any human idiot, with a good heart enough as hearts go—because that describes him, very fairly—would write such a sentence as this to his sister's husband if he were not under a spell of some sort. No, no!—it's the Settlement. That's what it is." I heard the letter handed to the lady, by its rustle, and felt that she looked thoughtfully at the passage.

She must have forgotten my presence for the moment, for she read, loud enough for me to hear:—"I have no hesitation in holding you morally responsible, whatever the legal aspect of the case may be, for the disastrous consequences of a neglect which——" She stopped suddenly, saying, "What?" as though my father had spoken, which he had not. I conceive that he had glanced round significantly at me.

Then my father, as though to test the degree of my abstraction, said cheerfully:—"Well—how's Horace?" To which I responded:—"Beastly difficult to do. What's *argilla*?" For I did not see why I should not utilize sporadic knowledge to save a reference to Ainsworth.

My recollection of this incident—which I believe I have recorded fairly—shows me why I knew more than Gracey what was going on, and I know she knew more than either Ellen or Roberta. Can I recollect the letter now that my stepmother proceeded to read aloud, or part of it? I can try. I am discouraged at the outset by a failure to recall how it opened—with my father's name or "dear Sir." But I am sure the text was as follows, or a near equivalent:

"I cannot profess surprise at the news of your recent marriage, the news of which now reaches me for the first time, but I must confess to some astonishment that no communication has been received by my mother or myself hitherto. She desires me to say that she does not consider any expression of opinion, favourable or otherwise, to be called for by the circumstances. She therefore abstains entirely from comment. At the same time she cannot be blind to the fact that this young person, whom you have *put in the place of my late lamented sister*, was for some years in your employment *as a governess*, and she wishes you to know that she draws the *same inferences from the fact* that the World will draw. For the same reason it must be distinctly understood that she *will not consent to receive her*. At the same time she is prepared to overlook her connection with your son and daughters, to whom this does not extend, as they are *in no sense responsible*. . . ."

Then followed some three pages of which I can recollect nothing, except that the style was well maintained. But I remember the peroration. Here it is:

"It is my painful duty to add that I consider it incumbent on me to say that I have no hesitation in holding you morally responsible, whatever the legal aspects of the case may be, for the disastrous consequences of a neglect which only terminated with my lamented sister's tragic death."

And then he remained, I think, my father's faithfully.

That exhausts my recollection of that letter. Julius Florus was undisturbed for the rest of that evening, as even while my father was supplying me with the English for *argilla*, his wife announced that she would be better in bed, and retired for the night. "Your stepmother," said my father, "has got overtired. That's all."

I felt called on to say something, and began it:—"I thought Je——"

"Mima," said my father.

"Was looking blue," said I. I did not feel revision necessary, as my father had not called for it. I devoted myself to Julius Florus, and got to the twentieth line, my prescribed limit.

I was not a little surprised, some while after—about Christmas, I think, as the roads were slippery—when my father ended up a conference with me in his library by saying:—"Very good, human schoolboy, use a crib as much as you like. If you can make out why it's the English for its original, you will do quite



as much as can be expected of a human schoolboy. Now do you know what you have got to do on Sunday afternoon?"

"Skate on the Serpentine, if it freezes," I said, confidently. The Serpentine was at its usual tricks, promising to freeze, and thawing suddenly in the night.

"I'm afraid you'll have to break the appointment with the Serpentine," said my father. "Because you are to accompany your stepmamma on a visit to Highbury. But it can't matter. Because the Serpentine cannot possibly know who is skating on it."

I believe I said:—"Hookey!" and looked my curiosity for further particulars.

"Why *hookey*, I wonder?" said my father, thoughtfully. He tried, to judge by his look, to solve me as a problem, and to stand me over as temporarily insoluble, then went back to his text. "Yes—your stepmamma has got it into her head that she can make peace with——" He paused a moment, controlling a disposition to laugh. "What was it Varnish called your venerable Granny? An old——?"

"Old Spitfire!" I supplied the name with unscrupulous enjoyment.

"Precisely!" said my father. "She imagines she can make peace with the old Spitfire—says a soft answer turneth away wrath. I suppose that was King Solomon's experience. I can't say it is mine. In fact, I become infuriated. However, that's neither here nor there."

"What's she going to say to her? I mean, what Miss Ev——?"

"That won't do—try again! No objection to Jemima! But not 'Miss Evans.'"

"Well, Jemima then! What's Jemima going to say to the Gran?"

"You'll hear when she says it, young man. That's enough information at present for one of your age and sex. You'll have to do without endangering your life on rotten ice half-an-inch thick, for once."

I looked lugubrious. "Suppose it's three inches thick, and quite hard," said I, "won't Jemima wait?"

My father glanced at the window. "I'll give you that," said he. "If the ice is three inches thick, Jemima will wait." This meant—no chance for the skating!

"But won't Bert or Ellen do as well?" said I, ruefully.

"Those young women, I believe, have declined to go, without

thanks. And I'm not sure that if they do go, it would better matters. I can see my way to you and Gracey. So be resigned to your hard fate!"

"All right!" said I, grudgingly. But resignation turned out an easy task. For the Serpentine only froze just enough to keep the ice of promise to the ear, but broke it to the skate, as whose ventured thereon that Sunday found to his cost. The frost itself continued; it was the Serpentine that was in fault—sheets of water indulge idiosyncracies. The roads were, according to Thomas, mortally slippery when he drove us over to Highbury in the brougham.

However, we got there—my stepmother, Gracey, and myself. I could see Gracey's excitement and curiosity in her blue eyes as we approached the house; and I felt curious too about the outcome of this singular visit, which I believe was quite unexpected. I kept a furtive eye on Jemima, to fathom her sentiments if possible, but her face was inscrutable. She was looking her best, in a sealskin wrapper that seemed to have been meant for her by Destiny; that power having been well-disposed towards her at the time. I suppose that my frequent peeps at her equable face made me analytical, for I remember attaching more weight than usual to the pretty ripple of her hair over the white forehead it half-hid, and also thinking, with the perverse improbability of a boy's mind, that if my ferocious grandmamma wanted to scalp this intruder in her family circle, her opportunity to do so would be all that Catlin's North American Indians, or any one else's, could desire. Gracey's anticipations were probably less highly coloured than this, but I saw her sidelong glance at the culprit—I was opposite, of course—and almost, in a sense, saw her wondering at the oddity of the situation.

I recall, in connection with this drive, that it was the first occasion on which my mind accepted and ratified yet another mode of denominating my stepmother than Miss Evans, Jemima, or Mrs. Pascoe, the last being the exclusive property of Varnish. This new designation was not one absolutely unused in the early days of Mecklenburg Square, and had been revived as a convenient solution of a real difficulty—what Miss Evans was to be called now that she had captured the citadel our mother had hitherto been sole mistress of. "Mamma" was quite out of the question, and "Miss Evans" clearly would not do. Fancy "Good-night, Miss Evans!" at bedroom-candle time! I had all but used it once, but was stopped by my father's:—"Come, I say, Master Jackey, draw it mild!" I drew it mild somehow, but chiefly by

evading nomenclature altogether. Jemima's musical laugh, and "Dreadful boy!" on that occasion, are with me still, for all the lifetime that has come between.

"Aunt Helen," said Gracey, using this revived epithet, when we got out of the noisy traffic, "What *do* you think Grandmamma will *say*?"

"My dearest child, I haven't the slightest idea."

I supplied a prediction of an unfeeling nature. "She'll tremble all over with fierceness," said I.

"Oh, Jackey—however can you!" said my sister, and our stepmother turned a glance towards me that was as much amused as shocked. "Boys will be boys," said she, "to the end of the chapter. Wait till you're eighty, young man!" I set up a partial defence, saying:—"Other people are eighty, just as much as her," meaning thereby that all octogenarians were not tigerish. I was thinking of old Mr. Wardroper, our predecessor at The Retreat.

I had never been at my grandmamma's villa since my mother's death, nor had any of my sisters. On returning to it I was impressed by the way it had maintained its identity, having had no experience of how our own lives may be turned upside down without the rest of the world taking the slightest notice; and I felt nettled at the trim front garden and the well-cleaned windows, the long flight of stone steps up to the front door, faultlessly hearthstoned, sanded now with golden sand for safety, in keeping with the dazzling polish of the brass knocker and letter-box flap they resulted in. I felt quite reproachfully towards the more than emerald-green dovecot on a post in the stable-yard, seen across the trellis that was as nothing now, but that I knew would be white with jasmine in six months. I remember looking at it as we paused on the expanse of stone landing we had climbed to, following by permission or invitation the unimpeachable white apron-tie of a flawless housemaiden who had opened the garden gate. I resented that dovecot's stolid insensibility, which almost made a parade of ignoring my mother's death. I was unreasonably outraged by the tone of its inhabitants' conversation, merely because it was exactly the same as two years since. I was not quite satisfied with Rab, the rough Pomeranian, who came out to smell us, and appeared to go back into the house to say we were all right as far as smell went. But he had always done so, and he annoyed me by making no difference between Miss Evans and my mother. "Rab" was an abbreviation, not of the Scotch for Robert, but of Rabies.

Not that he was mad, but in connection with a picturesque practice of my uncles, who christened animals after the most formidable disorders to which they were liable. Thus the coach-horses who lived under that dovecot were respectively Staggers and Glanders, although neither was suffering from either calamity. Also my grandmother's canary, a treasured favourite, had been christened Pip; most unfairly, as it was a robust bird, not subject to indisposition.

"Shan't we go in, Aunt Helen?" said Gracey, when that pause on the top step was ten seconds old.

"Hush a minute, Gracey dear!" said Aunt Helen, listening to sounds of colloquy, between docile acquiescence and splenetic exasperation, within. The flawless one, after letting us in with a gate-key she went back for—for she had deemed us a mistake until she had attestation to the contrary—had preceded us into the house as a harbinger, admitting that it might be desirable to get the authority of headquarters, which were In, but not Up.

Gracey and I were disconcerted—though I was not sure she was not relieved, too—when the owner of the white apron came back dejected; all her edge taken off, I supposed, by the extreme violence of the old Spitfire. How she communicated to my stepmother that Mistress, though In, and nearly Up, was quite clear that she would *not* see Mrs. Nathaniel Pascoe, I do not know, as I did not catch her words, but Gracey understood them, and exclaimed:—"There, Aunt Helen, didn't I say so? I *knew* she wouldn't."

"Then we can't help it, can we, my dear?" said Aunt Helen. She was fishing in a mother-of-pearl card-case with a silver *H* inlaid, to get at a conciliatory offering, a submerged card of my father's—the other cheek to the smiter, the soft answer to turn away wrath—when I perceived at the garden-gate my Uncle Sam, looking prosperous and rosy, and well-shaven for Sunday. He had arrived in a currie with two horses, and an enormously heavy fancy coachman's overcoat, with buttons like saucers, and a lining like the fur of a buffalo.

"You tool the prads up and down till I tell you, little Foundlin'," he was saying, to the minute groom attached to his chariot, whose peculiar name had been bestowed on him in honour—or dishonour—of his parents, who had neglected the precaution necessary to establish their family's legitimacy. At present, so said my Uncle Sam.

"Oh—it's your other uncle," said my stepmother. This meant that she knew him much less than his brother. Indeed, she can

have seen but little of either, all told; but she certainly knew most of Uncle Francis.

Now my Uncle Sam and Gracey had always been in each other's good books. Therefore, Gracey greeted him affectionately and started towards the garden-gate to meet him.

I saw he looked pleased, the more that he forthwith assumed his good-humoured manner; a sort of lazy drone with as few accents as possible, and no consonants to speak of. "Oozish a com'nalong?" is the best spelling can do for his reception to Gracey. But one can't spell drowsiness, especially when it is a *parti pris*. The upshot of his greeting to her was:—"Who is this coming along? Who is the grown-up young lady?" To which Gracey replied:—"Me!"—and threw her arms round his neck. I endorsed her testimony, saying:—"It's us." He acknowledged Gracey's accolade with:—"Now another, t'other side where there's no plaster!" presenting an intact cheek. He pulled my nose slightly, not to seem unconscious of me. As he did so, I saw him looking furtively at Jemima, who was putting her card-case away.

Now this uncle of mine perceived in the *genus* Woman—so says my memory of him—two distinct species, the sort with nonsense about it, and the sort without. Perhaps nonsense did not mean decorum, but it must have meant something akin, by the contexts he used with it. They were odd, and often difficult to follow. I remember hearing him say, in contrasting the qualities of two sisters, that one of them might have been a parson's daughter, for the matter of that, while the other was distinctly a ripping female, without a scrap of that sort of nonsense about her. I am, and was, in the dark about the exact value of his terminology; but of this I am sure, that he would not have hit it off, as the phrase goes, with the former of these two young ladies; while it would have stood a poor chance, whatever it was, of remaining on between himself and the latter. I connect a certain awkwardness, or shyness, in the presence of all young ladies, that he betrayed on first introduction, to his uncertainty as to which of these species the sample presented belonged to.

My impression is, that he had this feeling about Jemima. I gathered that her appeal to sentiments of his class had gained force by a greater latitude in dress than her position as a governess had allowed her, to say nothing of the moral effect upon her of her new position. For he said to Gracey, *sotto voce*, while his eyes rested perceptively on the rather distinguished figure that was now halfway down the paved approach from the gate



to the door:—"Who's the lady swell, Sixpence? Your new thingummybob!" The name he called my sister by was a private one, only in use by himself and his brother.

"It's our stepmother, Miss Evans," said Gracey, making up for a loud whisper by dramatic play of the countenance. Then she tried to throw out an apologetic word or two. "She isn't really nasty, you know, Uncle Sam."

I may have caught his comment, half-spoken to himself, wrongly. It sounded like:—"Where's the governess?" I treasured in my mind an intention to say, if appealed to, that Jemima was rather a brick. No opportunity occurred for the production of this testimonial. For Jemima was upon us. She was perfectly at her ease, while my uncle was distinctly embarrassed. At the time I accepted this embarrassment as one that he would have betrayed equally in the presence of any other young lady of showy exterior.

Her hand came out to shake his as soon as the card-case was disposed of; not before. The delay accentuated her deliberation, and gave the concession value. I think she also strengthened her position by taking preliminary greetings for granted, saying merely with a slight shrug and eyebrow-action:—"Driven away, Mr. Sam!" which perhaps laid claim to a familiarity she was not entitled to. I was aware that, somehow, she had made a friend of my uncle.

I could not understand, with my boyish perceptions, how the possessor of so perfect a silk hat as his could be got over so easily. The beauty and newness of its inside was impressing me as he held it, doffed to salute the lady, well out of the way of my heedlessness, or Gracey's. I could see the line it had left on his forehead, for his complexion, which was fair, showed marks. "You don't say that now, Mrs. Pascoe?" said he, and this clear use of her name seemed to improve relations still further.

"Indeed I do, Mr. Sam! Obligated to fly the country!" She glanced slightly towards the house, and the glance seemed to convey enlightenment. For Uncle Sam said:—"Old lady been cuttin' up rough—is that it?" And both laughed. I then became aware that our visit had not come to an end, though I could not guess how events meant to work. I felt very curious. "I haven't *seen* her, you know," she added. "She sent out word. I'm one of the sinners, I'm quite aware of that, but why these two children?"

Uncle Sam did not consider the last word spoken clearly. "Old lady'll fizzle down," he said. "On'y give her time! She hasn't

had time." His lazy *insouciant* speech ignored the aspirates, but I cannot omit them in writing, as a want of culture is connected with dropped H's. Now, although Uncle Sam was not highly cultured, that was not the cause of his H-droppings, which were a *parti pris*, adopted to show the extent of his indifference to his topic. *He* could not be at the trouble to aspirate H's about trifles! That was the implication.

"Oh, Mr. Sam, I wish I could think so. I fear she has a strong character."

"Not the old lady. Don't you be afraid of her. She's a bit of an old Turk at the first go-off, as often as not. But *she'll* fizzle down."

"And meanwhile——?"

"Supposin' we was to go inside!"

"Ought we to?"

"On a Sunday? I always do everythin' I oughtn't to on a Sunday. So does little Sixpence, I lay." He tickled Gracey, who was holding his arm. She said:—"Oh—Uncle Sam!" remonstratively. He then suggested that we should all go into a side room, which he had somehow monopolized, so that it was known to the household as Mr. Sam's room. "You'll be able to hear the old lady swearin' at a distance," said he, as an inducement.

"How kind you are, Mr. Sam!" said my stepmother. "And you really think she'll soften?"

"You see if she don't!" said my uncle in his laziest way. "Git along in, you two brass fardens!" What he then did reminds me how long ago this was. He offered his arm to my stepmother, who made use of it. In those days one met with sporadic survivals of a belief once universal, that you should always offer your arm to a lady. It was an article of faith with Varnish. Whatever manners my Uncle Sam had that were not his own invention had been instilled into him by my grandmother, who was eighty at about this period. He may have been thirty-six, being the youngest son of a large family.

It is rather singular that I should retain so vivid a recollection of this encounter with Uncle Sam at the front gate, and have such a poor memory of what followed. We went into the Pigsty—my uncle's designation for his sanctum—and sat by a blazing fire listening to the sounds of a distant collision between my uncles and their old mother. I drew inferences from its pauses and cadences. Uncle Sam was endeavouring to influence the old lady towards a reconciliation, partly from contradictiousness, partly from the effect which a good-looking woman has on

a man of his type, when sufficiently showily dressed. I remember the place, the blazing fire, the voices, and my certainty of their general import, but cannot supply the connecting links with what followed. The scene changes in my mind to my grandmother's drawing-room, where she sits in her high-backed chair by another blazing fire, which her gold-rimmed spectacles flash back the more vividly that the day without is dying prematurely of a fog. Facing her is my stepmother, seated and looking her best; perfectly cool and collected, I must say. My Uncle Sam is lounging on a sofa midway, with Gracey on its margin leaning against his waistcoat. My memory takes cognizance of my Uncle Francis's back, in the middle window, I think, and the intermittent movement of his head either way to bring alternate nostrils to bear on a double-barrelled pinch of snuff. What I cannot determine is where I myself, who see it all, am in the room. Does it matter?

My granny is justifying to the full my forecast of her attitude. She is trembling all over with fierceness. But, although I can see it in her old hand on the chair-leather from where I am—wherever that is—it is not evident in her voice. I can remember her voice, but not the words it said. I have to reconstruct them.

"I have intimated to you, Mrs. Pascoe—as I suppose I must call you—that I desire not to see you. My son Francis has already, at my request, written my reasons for refusing to receive you. I do not consider myself bound to add one word to what I have already said. But I have given way to the wish of my son Francis, and also my son Samuel——"

Her son Samuel interrupted her, saying three times distinctly:—"Don't bring *me* in—don't bring *me* in—don't bring *me* in!" lying back on the sofa and shaking his head with his eyes shut. He ended up:—"I ain't in it," and I suspect pinched or tickled Gracey, to express alliance aside, as she entered some protest *sotto voce*.

My grandmother resumed what I was pleased to call her jaw. I believe I reconstruct it fairly. "I have given way to my son's wish that I should see you—whatever my son Samuel may say to the contrary—for you to know from my own lips my opinion about your husband's shameful neglect of my daughter in her last illness . . ." My stepmother showed signs of interrupting, and the old lady caught her up tartly. "I do not wish to hear anything you have to say," she said, and my stepmother murmured deprecatorily:—"Oh, is this just?"

My Uncle Sam, without unclosing his eyes, expressed sympathy. "Dairmed unjust, I should say," said he. "But just—you—sit—still, and let the old lady work it off."

This colloquy had slipped in, while the old lady was already working it off. "Nothing that you say can alter my opinion that my daughter was the victim of gross negligence, and that her husband was responsible for that negligence. You can tell him from me that I hold him morally guilty of murder. My son Francis minces matters like a poltroon, and refuses to write as I direct him. Yes—I tell you it is so. I am in his power, for how can I write myself, when I cannot hold a pen?"

My Uncle Francis protested; weakly as I thought then, and still think. "Come, I say, Mother!" it's as much as I can depose to. Uncle Sam remarked, placidly, in spite of the heavy firing that was going on:—"Old lady's pitchin' it rather strong. But I ain't in it."

My stepmother, whose breath I conceived had been taken away by the sudden vigour of the old Spitfire's attack, recovered it and turned to Uncle Sam. "Surely, Mr. Samuel, you can never believe such a horrible accusation."

"I ain't in it," said Uncle Sam.

The old lady stood to her guns. "Samuel and Francis, you may shuffle out of it. You may turn tail, and leave your old mother to tell the truth. But you know what you have said of your sister's death——"

"What have we said?" I think both spoke.

"You know what you have said of this Miss Evans woman. In *this* room! Yes—here!"

Uncle Samuel looked amused, and Uncle Francis embarrassed. The latter took more snuff into one nostril than was usual with him, as though it was impossible to go on to the next nostril until this difficulty was disposed of. The former had the impudence to say, addressing his brother:—"What have you been a-sayin' about Mrs. Pascoe, Frank? Out with it! Don't bottle it up!"

I hope the dim recollection I have of the old lady at this moment is wrong. For she turns fiercely on her eldest son and says:—"Answer your brother!"

"If you are going to pay any attention to Samuel, I shall let it alone." Thus Uncle Francis, still keeping the other nostril waiting, as a consentaneous action with the halt in the conversation.

Uncle Sam exaggerated his drony manner in harmony with a continuous shake of the head, to say:—"Don't you expect to get

out of it that way, Frank! What have you been a-sayin' about Mrs. Pascoe? That's the point. You keep to the point, my good fellar!" He then remarked aside to my stepmother:—"Nothin' like keepin' these legal characters to the point. Slippery lot they are!"

Perhaps the accusations against my stepmother were repeated, or insinuated, and I did not understand them. For I only remember what presents itself now to me as meaningless altercation until my stepmother says:—"What does it matter what Mr. Frank or Mr. Samuel have said about me? We all say angry things that we are sorry for afterwards, sometimes. I can forgive anything that has been said against myself, although I grieve that any one I respect—for I do respect you, dear Mrs. Wigram——"

"Don't call me 'dear,'" snapped the old lady.

My stepmother went on without noticing the interruption. "That any one I respect should believe such malicious nonsense. But I cannot bear to hear dreadful charges brought against my dear husband, knowing as I do—and how can any one know better—how utterly and cruelly false they are. I came here today, dear Mrs. Wigram"—the old lady snorted—"to try and influence you towards a more charitable judgment of him. I came in the face of your prohibition, and I ask you only to hear me. Remember that I was there the whole time——"

My Uncle Francis interrupted. "I think that's fair, Mother," said he. "I don't think Mrs. Pascoe's travelling outside the record." He always used any legal phrase that came to hand, and I think felt thereby like Counsel, or at least *Amicus Curiae*.

"I am silent," said the old lady, savagely. "But I retain my opinion." She became a grim monument of determination not to be convinced.

My stepmother continued: "I was there during the whole of my dear employer's"—her voice wavered and threatened tears—"last sad illness, and I am sure I can tell you—if you will hear me—what will convince you that there was no neglect."

Uncle Francis interjected, professionally:—"I think we are bound to hear Mrs. Pascoe's statement." My grandmother said inexorably:—"It will not change my opinion." Uncle Sam said something under his breath that I did not catch, but afterwards Gracey assured me, that at this juncture he had said:—"Go it one, go it t'other!" I can easily believe it.

I believe that I am supplying a good deal of this—writing what *must* have been said, to supplement what I heard, and remember. I know that I cannot write "Mrs. Pascoe's statement," as she



spoke it, but I can give its substance. On the night of the tragedy, she had been the last person—so she said—to look in at my mother's room before the discovery that the patient had taken that fatal double dose of laudanum. She could vouch for the fact that the bottle that contained it was safe on the chimney-piece, at a great distance from the bed. She had noticed this particularly, though she did not go further than the door of the room, for my mother had said she was then quite comfortable. She was not sleepy, but she wanted to lie quiet, and not to have people fussing in and out, but the boy might come in, to say good-night. The medicine glass was on the table by the bed, but she was quite certain there was nothing in it. If any living creature was to blame for what happened it was she, the deponent herself, for not entering the room and removing the medicine bottle still further from the patient. But, candidly, would any of her hearers have done so, under the circumstances?

"We shall have to give Mrs. Pascoe the benefit of that," said my Uncle Francis, who was gradually becoming a cross-examiner, with legal acumen, as well as snuff visible in every twitch of his nostril. "Eh, Mother?"

My granny took no notice of this, but fixed a basilisk glance on my stepmother. "How do you know you were the last person to look into the room?" she said.

"Oh—how *do* I know?" was the response, which I remember clearly enough, given as though the speaker was really distressed with a suspicion that she might have taken the fact for granted rashly. But she recovered, saying:—"Oh, but I am sure that I *was*!"

"Why, of course, you were, Aunt Helen," struck in Gracey, looking very white, but not overwhelmed, and seeming to understand the points at issue. "As if I wasn't there in the house all the time!"

I also testified. "Nobody'd been in when I was there," I said, giving as a certain fact what was really only my own strong conviction. Older folk than I have done the same, before now.

My Uncle Sam seemed to accept a moment's silence as a confession of public conscience that this topic should not have been mooted before us youngsters. For he said, with severity:—"There, now you see! Talkin' before these kids! What did I say to you? I only ask, what did I say? Why, of course, the kids are takin' notice, and mean to. *You ain't a baby, little Sixpence!*" Gracey confirmed this, saying:—"No, I'm not. At least, I shall be almost directly." My Uncle proceeded:—"It's no use your tellin' me! If

you talk before a young lady that's nearly out, you'll just have to take the consequences. Makin' believe they are in the nursery! But *I wash my hands.*"

"Perhaps," said my stepmother, "I did wrong to bring them with me. It was my husband's wish that they should come." It occurred to me then, and I see it clearly now, that my father thought of me and Gracey as possible buffers between his bride and the storm of indignation she was likely to encounter. I doubt if he anticipated our taking part in the probable *mêlée*, only meaning that our presence should serve as a check on the operations of the enemy. It is not unlikely that he made the usual mistake of underestimating our years, as parents do. They forget that their children are no longer in the nursery, until some rough revelation of their maturity brings it home to them. Under this delusion he had assented to my stepmother's importunity that she should attempt to carry an olive-branch into the hostile territory, sheltered by the youth and inexperience of the rising generation the project was intended to benefit.

But he was reckoning without his host in this calculation that we could be present, and yet be kept outside active operations. For Gracey, whom I suppose to have been far ahead of me in her perception of the realities of life, took the bit in her teeth, and—however faulty the metaphor may be—flared up.

"I don't care, Uncle Sam," said she, responding to some dissuasion undetected by me, "I'm *not* a baby and I *will* speak. Dear Mamma got at the horrible medicine herself"—here the poor child broke into passionate tears—"and took—and took it herself—twice as much as was meant on the bottle—and it *killed* her—and it's cruel and wicked to say that it was any fault of Papa's. I don't care—I tell you it *is*. *Why*, it was miles off, the bottle was! Aunt Helen *saw* it—she's told you so——"

I think I recollect that at this point my Uncle Frank said in a dry, disagreeable way:—"Yes—Mrs. Pascoe has *told* us so, certainly," and his mother turned on him sharply, with:—"Hold your tongue, Frank, till you're asked to speak!" To which he replied:—"Very good—I'm out of it," and became morosely silent.

My stepmother said in a quick, parenthetical way, as a fact just due to herself to mention:—"The bottle was on the mantel-shelf near the washstand, quite on the other side of the room. No one could have imagined it possible." Possible, that is to say, that my mother should get up, ill as she was, and cross the room to get at this bottle. It did, indeed, seem a thing no one could have foretold. But she had done it. For there was the

attestation of the last person who had looked into the room, until I entered it, when my father told me to do so, and was presently alarmed at her silence and the coldness of her hand and the bed. I fancy I remember writing of this some time since.

I recollect my grandmother's eyes fixed on Gracey, through her gold spectacles, with what I thought an appreciative look in them. "Yes," said she, speaking to my stepmother, "you did wrong to bring the children with you. What did you expect?"

Then to my Uncle Sam:—"What are you saying to the girl, Samuel? Send her over to me." Whereupon Gracey, who told me afterwards my uncle's words, "Never you mind the old lady. You stick up to her!" crossed over to her grandparent rather reluctantly, who examined her face carefully, and came to a conclusion. "You're a Brewster," said she, and for a full two seconds I imagined this an epithet of condemnation or censure; but it was only her own maiden-name, which I had always known as a fact, but had never visualized. It had been in some knowledge-box whose key I had lost. She surprised me by saying:—"Kiss me, child! You do right to take your father's part. My sons are different."

I have an impression that Uncle Sam's comment on this was:—"Must kick somebody!" Uncle Frank stopped to shrug his shoulders, halfway through several milligrammes of snuff, and then absorbed the balance curtly. He seemed resentful, while his brother didn't seem to care.

A kind of truce seemed to come about over the impropriety of thrashing out the point before us youngsters. But the joy of battle had gone out of intercourse, and Gracey and I felt ourselves wet blankets—at least, I did. I was forming an opinion that my mother's family's *modus vivendi* was dissension, and it matured later.

This was not the end of the conversation, but it was the last I can report of it. For Gracey and I retired by request into Uncle Sam's pigsty, and had candles, not to be in the dark. We listened to the voices in the other room, with comments, as thus:

"That's Jemima."

"Yes—that's Aunt Helen."

"She's stopped—No she hasn't . . . Yes, she has . . . Now that's Gran."

"Yes—that's Grandmamma. . . . That's Uncle Sam, interrupting." An apparent collision was followed by a lull.

"She's shut him up. Isn't she a one-er! . . . I say—what a long innings she's having!"

"Now she's done. I thought she sounded civiller. Who's that?"

"Only Uncle Francis. He'll work her up again. . . . Now *he's* got shut up, and that's her. . . . No—she's just the same fierceness."

"Isn't that Aunt Helen crying?"

"I betted she'd blub before they'd done." This was untrue, taken literally. I had laid no wager.

"I thought she would. *I* call it a shame."

"That's the whole lot, all together. They're going it! They'll go on all night, at that rate."

"No, they won't! There's Granny on the top. . . . Now I think I can hear them stopping. . . . Only they've begun again."

"You see, if they don't go on all night."

"No—I'm right! They're dying down. . . . Yes—Aunt Helen's coming out. Uncle Sam's being civil."

"Why can't Uncle Francis be civil?"

"He's got some idea. Besides, he's a lawyer."

"I don't see that that counts. . . . I say, I hope they *are* shutting up. What'll the Governor say about keeping Thomas's mare so long in the cold?"

And so on. However they *did* shut up, in the end, and Gracey and I were sent to say good-night to our grandmother.

My stepmother was reticent about any actual or possible results of the interview. Thomas drove us home over slippery roads through a dense fog, and we got to The Retreat very late and found my father just on the point of starting off to discover and rescue us, Heaven knows where or how.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

SOMETHING was brewing, that hot summer night in the garden, that I am sure I was writing about not so very long since—only I can't hunt it up now—between my sister Roberta and Mr. Anderson Grayper, and it was *not* a quarrel. It occurs to me that hot summer nights dwell vividly in the memory, for how clearly I recollect that one a year before when—as I am convinced—my father's treaty with Miss Evans was ratified. History repeated herself in this case, and I, schoolboy that I was, did not lay her first recitation to heart, or I should have been less unprepared for her second.

But then it was a *sister*! The idea never crossed my mind that one of those inferior creatures should take the bit in her teeth, and bolt in harness with a male outsider, who—strange to say—possessed absolutely no charm for her younger brother! Why should the second marriage of a father—who of course knew all about marrying, having done it before—suggest the possibility of such an outrageous new departure on the part of a sister?

Let me recall the story as best I may. I shall refer to many events of the time that have nothing to do with it, because any of these may strike a precious lode of memory, and bring back things of ten thousand times more importance than themselves.

Roberta kept her own counsel about her intentions, and Mr. Grayper's. I am sure she did, though I cannot conceive why my father should not have been taken into the confidence of either, unless indeed she made use of her love-affair as an object lesson, to emphasize her resentment of my father's marriage with Miss Evans, especially with reference to the clandestine character of their wedding, and her own exclusion from its programme.

Jemima would have done more wisely to make her a bridesmaid. Then she might, or might not, have made that weak young man the partner of her joys and sorrows. If it had been shown that she was really longing for it, I cannot imagine that my father would have offered any serious opposition to their union. He was far too good-natured to do so, on any grounds but the proposed son-in-law's moral character, or his probable poverty. As to the former,



he was visibly blameless; while, as to the latter, he was certain of a partnership in the brewery—You know? “Grayper’s Entire.” He was that Grayper—and his mother was one of the Brewers of Milldale. But he had a turn for the Drama, and I suppose Roberta had another; a common ground of sympathy. It was, strangely enough, for most of two years accepted by both families as a sufficient pivot for friendship to turn upon; and indeed it is possible that Roberta only discovered that she loved the young man as soon as the idea occurred to her of making him the stalking horse of Retributive Justice; a means towards effectual condemnation of her father and stepmother. Whether, in doing so, she was cutting off her nose to spite her face, opinions may differ.

It does not matter now. Grayper has been dead twenty years; finally worried to death, said Gossip, by his third wife. Bert has been in her grave near half a century, and underneath the oak coffin containing his second—she herself having been treated to a leaden one—for this last twenty years. I have asked my Self in vain where or when we heard this fact. We did not go to the funeral of my sister’s successor.

I never mentioned to any of my family the embrace of these lovers, that I detected in the moonlight, but once, and then I was met with such incredulity that thereafter I remained silent, even to my father.

The occasion was a meeting of the Club, Varnish being present as a sort of favoured guest. Allusion had been made to the frequency of Roberta’s interviews with Mr. Grayper in connection with an approaching winter season of the Roehampton Rosciuses. But there had been no hint of a suspicion that there, “was anything,” and I think I felt insincere—the possessor, as it were, of a sort of guilty secret knowledge, that itched for publicity.

“I say, Varnish,” I began, “I saw her and him ki——” A powerful hand stopped the revelation. “You shut up, little Buttons!” said Cooky, with decision.

Said Gracey:—“Now, Monty, what nonsense! Why isn’t Jackey to speak? It’s only us. Besides, he’d got as far as ‘kis,’ and I can’t see what difference it can make if he does say ‘sing.’”

“All right, little Buttons! Go ahead.” Cooky’s docility to my sister was absolute.

“Kissing,” I shouted, all the more emphatically that I had, as it were, public sanction. “Kissing—kissing—kissing! What were they kissing for, if it’s not to count?” I then added particulars of time and place.

Varnish took exception to the accuracy of my observation. “Of

course it would count, supposin' they did it. Master Jackey. But supposin' you see wrong!"

"How far off had you to see?" said Gracey. I enlarged upon the subject, giving figures. Gracey's earnest eyes calculated thoughtfully. "You couldn't see persons kissing, as far off as that," said she.

"Oh yes, but I did," said I. "I could have seen them miles further off. Kissing! Both of them!"

"What I look at, to go by," said Varnish, "is them when there's company. Why they would be downright artful, to behave so strict! Just nothing beyond civil, *I* call it." This referred to the attitude of the culprits in the drawing-room, after the fact.

"That's only their rot," said I, forcibly.

Varnish shook her head, unconvinced. "When it's a young lady and gentleman, you can always tell," said she.

"Oh, you ridiculous boy, Jackey," said Gracey, "can't you see it was theatricals? They are always doing theatricals."

I believe that what I wanted to say was that it was too great a tax on human credulity to suppose that heartwhole embraces by moonlight, in loneliness, could be ascribable solely to a dispassionate study of the Thespian Art. But my vocabulary failed me, and I preferred:—"That's bosh!"

"You're a silly boy, Jackey," said Gracey. And so weak was the moral influence of my testimony, that neither she nor Varnish attached—or at least admitted that they attached—the slightest weight to it.

As for Cooky, he simply maintained a profound silence. Because, you see, he knew all about it.

Varnish was quite accurate when she described the public attitude of these secret *inamorati* as nothing beyond civil. I believe that Mr. Grayper was acting under orders, and that he would have preferred to confess up, and have an ascertained position. But Bert had her motives; and, with her, concealment was a *parti pris*. She went beyond passive non-confession, giving out that she had understood that Mr. Grayper was engaged to a Miss Pollexfen, which was so decisive a name that it nipped inquiry in the bud. Further, she assigned this engagement, which was an unblushing fiction, as a reason for being quite at ease in her intercourse with Mr. Grayper. I used to wonder how Miss Pollexfen contrived to do without so much of the young gentleman's society. More especially as he could never get away from the Brewery till five o'clock.

Nevertheless, shadow as I am almost certain she was, Miss

Pollexfen acquired a certain amount of credence in the family circle. I think her reputation for existence was helped by the restless vanity of its members, none of whom would admit that they knew absolutely nothing about her beyond her name. My father may, however, have been actuated by a desire to allow his second daughter every latitude of choice among little boys to play with. As, for instance, when Mrs. Walkinshaw, discerning afar that dear girl Bertie, with her admirer firmly pinned to her apron strings, exclaimed most succulently, "But who's the swain?" my father remarked, as to a confederate, "Nothing there. . . . Oh no! I know about it! He's engaged to a Miss Pollexfen. *That's all right!*" Whereupon the good lady, baffled in her spring, discerned a new source of social stage business, exclaiming:—"No—now really!—That *is* interesting. I wonder *which* Pollexfens." My step-mother, who was present, refused to be behindhand, saying with a puzzled air, "Oh, don't you know—those Pollexfens—Ecclesthorne;" and seemed to think that a rapid movement of her fingers would revive some forgotten particulars about this family, of which I don't believe any particulars ever were, or ever had been forthcoming.

However, this visionary young lady was of service in deflecting the Mrs. Walkinshaws of our visiting list from the scent of a love affair. I doubt if "the swain" had the technical art required to draw such a red-herring across its track in the case of his own family. For his mamma and his grandmamma called stiffly, with intent. It can only have been to express their own attitude towards a proposed measure which was not yet developed enough to warrant discussion on a first reading. But they seem to have relied on the subject being mooted by the other party, and the other party kept silence. Indeed, so long as my father did not inaugurate it, no one else felt warranted in doing so, and his uniform principle was to hold his tongue on all delicate topics. This one might have been indirectly approached by an inquiry after the Miss Pollexfen, but she was too shadowy even for that. The visit fell flat, and an attempt at parting to constitute its reality by cries of gratification fell flatter still. Delighted anticipations of quick and frequent recurrence of the phenomenon were so very unwarranted.

Therefore, it fell out that my legend of the kissing was discredited by all who heard it; and indeed, an idea grew that whatever other couple might be in danger from the darts of Love, this one was safeguarded against them. The Miss Pollexfen was an effectual one, in this case, and nobody anticipated the result that came about some weeks after the garden incident.

One day Roberta, who had gone away by herself early in the day, did not return as anticipated. She had refused, somewhat curtly, my stepmother's offer to convey her to her destination in the brougham, on the ground that it was quite in another direction, and that she could not wait so long, wishing to arrive early. She would shift for herself. Roberta was always very independent in her movements.

I believe the truth dawned on me first, partly because I knew I was right about the kissing, partly because since my father's marriage I had got into the way of suspecting that any single person or persons who failed to appear at lunch or dinner, as might be, had gone to the Altar. But it did not dawn upon me when she defaulted that day at lunch, because she had gone—report said—to the Flinders Cortrights' at St. John's Wood to play croquet, and she was sure to stop for lunch, though she had spoken of being back. Nor at dinner, because public opinion decided that she had stopped on. "Oh nonsense, my dear," said my stepmother to my father. "What a fidget you are! As if Roberta wasn't able to take care of herself!"

"But something may have happened," said my father, uneasily.

"Of course anything may have happened. What's to prevent it? Only nothing *has*—you may be sure of that. Nothing ever does happen when one gets in a stew. It's all thrown away. So now carve the hare and be contented." Whereby my father was silenced but not convinced. Also, the cook had left the hare's head on, in defiance of past requests, and this threw the previous question off the line.

The older the evening grew without the sound of cab-wheels in The Retreat, the firmer became the conviction that Roberta had stopped on. Reasoning was held sound that determined that if anything *had* happened we should have heard of it by now, *a fortiori* as *now* came to mean more and more half-hours gone for ever. Until at last my father revolted against further self-delusion, and sent for a hansom. The brougham, I remember, was for the moment disqualified for service, owing to some trifling mishap in the morning.

"Mayn't I come too?" said I, when the hansom had opened its jaws to receive my father. He assented, provided I looked alive. I looked alive, and forthwith we were on our way to St. John's Wood; naturally the first, because the only, clue to my sister's whereabouts.

I can lie here, fifty-five years later than that mysterious starlit windy night, and recall the silent streets as our cab-horse, informed

by its driver of the amount its fare had promised if he got over the ground in twenty minutes, threw his whole soul into promoting the interests of his master. I see again the lonely policeman on his beat, becoming aware of a case of alcoholism that can sing, across the street, and wondering probably whether that case will last out his own term, and remain a negligible quantity of beeriness, until he can leave him as an inheritance to his relief, and go off duty. Or that other, shutting his eyes to midnight in consideration of a bribe, outside the half-closed pothouse where that beeriness blossomed into song. And, in all the ride, not a hundred yards of pavement without its woman-outcast, whose meaning my boyhood had hardly come to the knowledge of. The wind-blown street-lamp at one corner flickers still for me on a face that it lighted up for one moment as we whirled across the canal-bridge at Maida Vale, and I wonder still whether the water was deep enough to drown her and give her rest and nothingness. Over fifty-five years ago, at this hour of writing! But I did not know then why she looked so greedily at the water.

My father had hardly spoken throughout the eighteen minutes—for the horse earned that five shillings for his master, nobly—but had sat with a rigid face and a bitten lip, and an impatient movement now and then. He only just got clear of the wheel, in his haste to get down and ring the bell at Grove Villa, which was the Flinders Cortrights'. That bell jangled perfunctorily, but nothing came of its first temperate suggestions.

"All gone to bed!" said my father. "Give 'em a minute." They had it, but showed no sign of life. A second more thrilling appeal, and a pause for results. "They're coming now," said he, listening.

They came, in the form of an old woman who lurched, who could not hear, and would not open the garden gate, preferring to speak through a cast iron lattice work of a pretentious design in its upper panels. Yes—that was Mrs. Cortright's, but the family was away in the Islands, or Highlands, as might be. She added what seemed irreconcilable with reason, that she herself was Mrs. Perquisite, the caretaker, and in bed, but could take a message. It seems odd now; to think how almost impossible it would be to find out what her name really was, if one had a mind to try.

My father accepted the name as I write it now. "Well!—open the gate, Mrs. Perquisite, and listen to what I say, and you shall have this shilling." The gate was opened. "Now tell me—has a young lady been here today to play croquet? With other young ladies of course."



But Mrs. Perquisite could not answer this question without a clear understanding as to what game the young lady had come to play at. She treated the subject as though several young ladies had been there in the course of the day, to play at several games—football, say, or chess, or lansquenet. She required an identification of the game of croquet, before she could give a final answer. My father had the misfortune to confuse her by saying, “With balls. . . . On the lawn—With mallets!” rather impatiently. I think she confused the last word with *malice*. It led, however, to a decisive negative, founded on a conviction that no young lady that came there would ever play at sech. Her disposition would be too sweet.

“Has *any* young lady been here?” said my father, severely, to clinch the matter. Well—no!—since my father put it that way, and no discrimination of games was needed, Mrs. Perquisite was in a position to say boldly that no young lady had come anigh that house since the family departed for the Islands or Highlands. Mrs. Perquisite received her shilling, and my father and I fled in the cab, which awaited us. He told the driver to make for a police-station between us and home—Marylebone, I think—and when we arrived there, went in to interview the inspector on duty, leaving me in the cab. It was during his absence that I began to associate my sister’s disappearance with Mr. Anderson Grayper. The idea made my mind much easier about her, for though I do not suppose I ever felt any anxiety comparable to my father’s. I had paid Roberta the compliment of feeling more concern about her welfare than it had ever occurred to me to feel before. I had even gone as far as a misgiving that to go snugly to a bed and sleep upon such an unsolved mystery would be in a sense sinful, but this abated now, and I looked forward to a normal night’s rest based on a theory that pointed to everything being all right somehow. As to whether such a rash step would lead to happiness or otherwise, that was Bert’s lookout, not mine.

I think if I had had the slightest idea of the nightmare possibilities that my father was conjuring up about his missing daughter, I should have spoken out freely about this surmise, and eased his mind. But I could only have advanced it as a pure conjecture of my own, and I could not remember any recent incident that pointed to such a thing, to give his speculations a list in the same direction.

I heard almost nothing of his interview with the police inspector. Coming out from the station door with him, the latter said without emotion:—“You may rely on everything being done correct,

Mr.—"—I thought he was never going to remember his name—"—Pascoe. Full particulars will be despatched at once to our head office, and in a few hours they will have them at every station in London. I shouldn't be the least uneasy, if I was you." And I saw that this official assurance—though it left matters exactly where they stood before—really acted as an anodyne to my father's anxiety. I am sure that, as we scoured away through the now almost empty streets, he felt that something had been done—something practical, correct, effectual! Nothing had.

As for me—though really I write with mistrust about my own feelings, so little do I remember them as compared with the vividness of surrounding event—I looked forward to finding, on our return, that some tidings had come to throw light on the mystery, probably in the sense of the theory I had framed to account for it.

But no news had arrived. I can still see the frightened faces that came out to learn the most unsatisfactory result of our expedition—can still hear the despairing exclamations that greeted it. What!—Never at Mrs. Cortright's *at all!* Were we sure? Which Cortright did we see? Who told us? And so forth—a torrent of exclamation nipped in the bud by a brief presentation of the empty house and its abortive curatrix.

What then were we to do? Where could we go to find out? What activity could we exercise to soothe our souls into the belief that we were doing something effectual? There lies the sting of the sudden blank a simple disappearance leaves in a great city. Let a dweller in some mountain village fail to find his home at night, and in a trice his kith and kin, and half the dwellers nearby are on his track, and dogs that know their errand as well as their masters, or better, are baying from ridge to ridge, discounting a triumph that is sure to come. Let a wanderer in the Australian bush vanish from eyes that watch for his return in vain, are there not the black trackers, whom such of us may follow as are swift of foot, to cherish the delusion that we too are factors in the search? But in a great city, where he whom we seek has become one of an unseen swarm, even this self-deception is at fault, for want of a clue. Nothing is left but to bear our intolerable souls as best we may, and go mad for a next minute to come which may have pity in its heart.

No respite came to my father all through that miserable night. I lay and listened to his restless pacing to and fro in his own room, until its monotony soothed me to sleep, in despite of an unreasonable conviction of the dutifulness of lying awake. Once asleep, Morphens, who didn't care twopence what became of my sister, saw

to Oblivion for me. I never woke, until the voice of Varnish came before her into my room and roused me:—"There now, Master Eustace, now what will you say when you're told?"

My answer was incoherent. It belonged to a conversation in a dream, with some sort of shellfish.

"You wake up, young Squire!" Varnish shook me, to hasten matters. "When you're quite woke'll be plenty of time to hear the news."

"No—I say—what is it though, Varnish? Stop humbugging!" That is to say—a truce to pleasantries! Get to the point!

"Your sister Miss Roberta, Master Eustace!"

I suddenly became wide awake, and sat up in bed with my knees up to my chin. "Jiminy Cracks!" I said, obscurely. "What *was* it?" Last night's events had come back to me.

"Your sister Miss Roberta, Master Eustace, she's gone and got herself married *to*—" Varnish paused, to enjoy her climax.

But I spoiled it for her. "That Ass Anderson Grayper!" said I. "Is that all? I don't see that *that* matters."

"Law now, Master Eustace, on'y think! Your sister's a Mrs."

"Much I care!"

"You unfeeling boy," said Gracey, coming in. "You ought to be thankful it's no worse."

"If only he wasn't such an Ass——!" I paused regretfully.

"But how ever come you to guess right?" said Varnish.

"As if I didn't know!" said I, scornfully. "*I* knew, fast enough."

"Then you should have up and said so, Master Eustace."

"I don't see that. Besides, it wasn't that sort of knowing."

Analysis of niceties in knowledge was averted by my father's voice from afar:—"When's that boy coming down? Breakfast's just ready." Which sent my visitors away for me to hurry my things on.

My father looked still worried, but on the whole relieved. "Give him the letter to read for himself," said he to my stepmother, after a curt announcement of Roberta's escapade. She remarked, "What—the boy!" but as he replied, "Yes!—the boy. Why not?" she handed me the letter. This is my nearest recollection of it.

#### "PIER HOTEL, FOLKESTONE.

"MY DEAR PAPA: I write this that you may not be uneasy about what has become of me. I am married to Mr. Anderson Grayper, and you will probably be applied to by the newspaper people to

verify the advertisement. I have no time for more now, as we have to catch the boat.

"I wish to say that this arrangement has been my own wish entirely, and that my husband is not responsible. If you wish for an explanation, I will tell you my reasons. Only *I think you will understand without*. They have been the same as *other people's*."

"Do not give my love to Miss Evans, only to Ellen and Grace and yourself, and believe me,

"Your affectionate daughter,

"ROBERTA GRAYPER.

"P. S. And the Boy. And Varnish of course."

I recollect that they all seemed curious about what I should say, and waited; Gracey only beginning, "What does she mean by——?" and being stopped by my father. "Don't give Master Jackey any tips!" said he. "Let's hear him on his own hook!"

"I know what she means," said I, somewhat resenting the suggestion that tips would have any influence. "She means by 'verify the advertisement.' Of course that means——"

"No I didn't," said Gracey. "I meant by 'other people's.' Who does she mean by *them*?"

My father laughed good-humouredly. "Why—of course me and your stepmamma!" said he. "Whom else could she mean? We're the culprits! Now what does Jackey say?"

I felt flattered and important. My oracular utterance was:—"It's all her cheek! All about explanations and other people is her cheek." I am not sure that I did not qualify her cheek as "beastly"—an unwarranted expression! I developed the subject further. Bert had been in an awful wax with Miss Ev . . . stopped by the censorship . . . and, if you came to that, with the Governor himself, because she wasn't a bridesmaid. This profound view of my sister's conduct only found a lukewarm public.

I don't think my father felt that his son was shining as an exponent of contemporary history. For he seemed ready to suspend the subject, saying:—"Well, well! We shall have a happy couple on our hands, that's all! Perhaps they'll be wiser after their honeymoon. . . . *I'm ready for breakfast, my dear. I don't know what you are.*"

If you know the Christian spirit of forgiveness to which suppressed execration changes when the guest appears who has kept dinner waiting, you will be able to account for the leniency with

which all of us viewed this needlessly irregular marriage. The fact was that the nightmare of an unaccountable disappearance had been so oppressive, that we should have welcomed the truant's return on any terms. For my own part, I have always felt that a sudden vacancy, unaccounted for, in a place some belonging of mine—not a beloved one of necessity—has vanished from, is harder to bear than the worst of mishaps with explanations. Yes—I would sooner the missing unit should return a leper than not return at all! Anything rather than an Old Oak Chest! And when the calamity is recognizably short of leprosy—when the only affliction involved is a sudden unprovoked son-in-law,—are we not excusable if we feel thankful for the outcome of our anxiety; as I really believe my father did, when he found that his affectionate daughter had become nothing worse than Roberta Grayper? For I have no doubt his imagination had run riot among possibilities more formidable than anything mine could achieve.

But there were things to be reckoned with. Among others the police. A solemn mysterious emissary called next day from Scotland Yard to inform my father that on the morning of my sister's disappearance a young lady of her name had been married by special license at some church at Putney, or thereabouts. Further, that the couple so married had been traced to Folkestone, and had probably gone to Paris. My father had to produce the letter he had received from the bride, feeling rather ashamed all the while; without, as he said, sufficient reason; for what was there unreasonable in his action? The police officer seemed to take umbrage at his lenient view of the situation, and would naturally have preferred some statutable outcome. My father had to affect a regret he did not feel that no proceedings could be taken against some person or persons. His daughter was certainly not yet twenty-one, but it would be absurd to pretend that she was still a child. She was a minor technically, no doubt, but . . . a good many buts. The officer expressed dissatisfaction with the state of the law. Girls should not be allowed to go away from home, to visit at friend's houses, to associate with the opposite sex or to invite its admiration by figging themselves up. Many other—in fact most other—things would not be allowed, if he had his way. But he could be, and was, mollified, and induced to take up the position that after all young women would be young women, say what you might. I don't think he left the house dissatisfied, but I cannot say with how much.

Another thing to be reckoned with was Mrs. Walkinshaw. I am sure my father would have compounded liberally with this good



lady in exchange for silence about our affairs, leaving her quite free to deal with everybody else's, or to make a like bargain with Society. But I must say this for Mrs. Walkinshaw; I believe her to have been quite above mercenary consideration. She was an example of a drug-habit, and a common one, though I don't exactly know the name of the drug. But I know its chief symptom, a keen interest in what does not concern the patient, and I can distinguish further between its acute and chronic forms. Varnish indicated this distinction once when she said to me, overhearing Mrs. Walkinshaw through a closed door:—"I declare if she ain't talking about a lady and a gentleman, Master Eustace." I said, "The door's too thick to tell;" and Varnish saw what I meant, for she replied, "It don't want to come through, for the sake of the meaning. So you go along, Squire! Why—'ark at that!" And I, harking at it, could discern a something halfway between roguery and relish—archness and carnivorousness—which my later experience has learned to associate with the acuter phases of the disorder. I diagnosed the symptom unmistakably when on the second day after I became the brother of a Mrs. this excellent lady was announced as a visitor to my stepmother. She may be said to have appeared in war-paint.

She loomed over us one moment—over all the family, that is, except my father, who had not yet come home—before she swooped to kiss the female members of it, who had to submit. But so full was she of her topic, that she interwove a large expansive interrogation into the web of her salutes. "And—what—is—this——? My dear Mrs. Pascoe, how well you *are* looking——! What—is—this—I—hear——! And my Elaine! My child, you are *absolutely lovely*—— What—is this—incredible news——! And dear Gracey, of course——? This incredible news about my Joan of Arc?" She had reached her climax, and accepted a sofa to hear the answer on.

I felt grateful internally that I had a stepmother who always proved a mistress of the situation, and I saw how her figure and its dress helped her. "My dear Mrs. Walkinshaw," said she, "your Joan of Arc has taken the bit in her teeth and provided herself with a husband. But don't ask *me* to account for anything!" She threw up the palms of her very elegant hands, to defend herself against interrogation.

"Then I mustn't ask." She submitted to circumstance, but as a box shuts, or a door. A hasp of any sort knocks all the heart out of passivity.

I think Jemima saw dangers ahead, for she surrendered the

point. "Oh—well, I suppose I may as well say what I do know. Of course, dear Mrs. Walkinshaw, you are such a *very* old friend!" Both went into a kind of ecstasy, or rapture, over the antiquity of this friendship. Jemima continued:—"I wouldn't tell every one this, but with you it's so different! You know, she's a character, Roberta is?"

"My dear, do I not always call her Joan of Arc?"

"Precisely. And she's very like her, if you can rely on her statues . . . I mean Joan's. Well—but really I'm not sure how much I ought to say!"

Mrs. Walkinshaw suddenly begged that she might be told *nothing*—nothing that was the *least* a secret. She merely curled up over that word "least."

My stepmother let out several reefs in a hurry, to catch the wind. "It's not such a secret as all that," said she. She looked attentively at her visitor for a moment or two, and then—rather over the heads of us young people, as one speaks to experience which will understand—added in a quick abated voice:—"She won't forgive me, you know! That was what was at the bottom of it."

"I understand. My dear, you needn't tell me another word."

"Yes—that was it! Nothing else."

"So *natural*! The dear girl!"

"It's not the least surprising. You know I can quite understand her position, and forgive her completely."

"Why of *course*! You have known her from a baby."

"Almost a baby. And she has always shown this decision of character. It is really a beautiful trait, however we look at it."

"And they've gone to *Paris*, this young couple." Mrs. Walkinshaw spoke as if this was an added testimony of the decision of character. Irresolution would have wavered on this side of the Channel, clearly! "But how *surprised* you must have been!"

"Quite taken aback. And we had a dreadful fright, too, because her letter was delayed till next day. How were we to know she had not come to some harm?"

I could not help intruding on the conversation, being impatient of what I thought humbug in it. "Bert didn't care twopence," said I; behind a side-wing, as it were.

"Oh, you boys!" said Mrs. Walkinshaw. And Jemima laughed equably.

But the question really before the house was still unsettled; to wit, my sister's motives in making a runaway match *nemine contradicente*. My stepmother no doubt thought this a good oppor-

tunity for an official statement, knowing that her interviewer might be relied on to tell every one immediately. Mrs. Walkinshaw was on no account to pay any attention to what Jackey said, nor to any boy at any time on any subject. Their dear Roberta had never supposed her letter would be delayed till next day. It was the Post. Letters would arrive of their own accord, if only the Post would not come in the way—so Jemima seemed to imply. She had no need to tell Mrs. Walkinshaw what it was that had produced such a sort of . . . *resentment*—it was the only word she could use—in our dear Roberta. Oh no—Mrs. Walkinshaw knew, without being told, that it was the steps her dear husband had thought prudent and advisable to take in connection with their own wedding. She sometimes felt uncertain whether in that case the wisest course had been pursued. But that was neither here nor there. My father's wish was her law, and it was no use crying over spilled milk. Anyhow—there it was! Roberta had felt—well!—*exasperated* at her father not having disclosed his intentions more plainly, and had, perhaps absurdly—though Jemima was not without sympathy for her—pursued a similar course in circumstances absolutely different, where no reason could possibly be assigned for it.

Mrs. Walkinshaw perceived everything with microscopic intensity, expressed by glaring, and squeezing out superlatives. No one who had the *least* understanding of girls could feel the *slightest* wonder at the course which so exceptional, yet typical, an example had adopted in this case. She herself approved—nay, applauded—everything that every one concerned had done. Everything did everybody credit. But if she had had an inquiring mind, and had weakly given way to its promptings, she might have felt inclined to ask whether it was possible that Roberta had shied off being married from her father's house, in view of the unpopularity of its present mistress. This last is not verbally reported, but abbreviated down to its bare meaning. For what with apologies, extenuations, reservations, "prudent pauses, sage provisos, sub-intents and saving clauses," the good lady took some time over expressing this simple idea. It certainly was not an easy one to propound, and I remember feeling afraid that Jemima would be offended, although I recognized a certain skill in the way it had been formulated.

But she only treated it with derision. Roberta's conduct had certainly been dictated by unforgiveness towards herself. It was, however, an assertion of independence, a censure of her father's concealment of his intended marriage and an affirmation of her

right to play the same part herself. The sentiment of it was that two could play at that game. "I don't believe," said Jemima, "that she would have looked upon it as being married from *my* house in the least. I doubt if the dear girl considers me the mistress of it at all."

I muttered, for Ellen to hear:—"No—she says you're Miss Evans." And Ellen checked me in a horrified way with:—"Oh, Jackey, don't!" Whereupon our visitor asked gushily what the dear boy was saying, and Ellen said I had said nothing. I did not repeat my remark, for a reason for which I afterwards found expression when I reported the interview to Varnish, in the words:—"I didn't want to be slobbered over by *her*." I believe Jemima heard, for she did not press for a repetition, and presently Mrs. Walkinshaw took her departure, overflowing with benedictions.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

How can recollections of over fifty years since be written, so that they shall not seem bald, disjointed, unconnected? Ask rather—how can they be written at all! Think what he who looks back over half a century has to see beyond, and wonder that that early world should be distinguishable from the crowd of incidents that succeed it!

And yet, they are distinct enough when Memory gets a clue to hold by. Things forgotten come back at the bidding of a chance image. For instance, that ride with my father to St. John's Wood in the hansom, all the events of which were hidden in Oblivion until a match was struck to illumine them. What *was* it now, that summoned that vanished journey from the past? Something as forgotten as itself, but a moment since! Was it the head of that hare my father carved at dinner? Very likely—since I fancy it so. But why? That is more than I can tell. If I were to trace every such clue that crosses my mind, and write all that each suggests, there would never—as my sister Ellen used to say—be the end of it. To avoid mere Chaos, I have to catch at landmarks, let what will revive in my mind, and leave cohesion to take its chance.

One such landmark is an event which placed, for a time, a metaphorical gulf between me and my beloved friend Cooky. He who had been a schoolboy like myself—however much he stood above me in his classes—became a college man, and adopted the style and title of “Mr. Moss.” I regret to say that he adopted a chimney-pot hat with it, thereby becoming for ever the slave of convention. It did not suit him. Sane banality sat ill upon the reputed semblance of Nebuchadnezzar—my father's name for him. When he appeared, not without pride, in his cylindrical headgear at The Retreat, he was treated with derision; indeed Gracey went so far as to call him an old clothesman. So, as I recollect, he thereafter kept it in the background as much as possible.

If I had not been within a twelvemonth of passing the barrier that separates the School from the College, this promotion might have fixed a great gulf between us. But I was so soon to know knowledge more grown-uply—nobody will ever read this word, so



why not use it?—than was possible to a schoolboy, with a cap, that our separation did not arrive—that, I see in newspapers, is a good expression to use nowadays—and might have been fairly described as a Platonic detachment. I was already looking forward to having my knowledge-box repacked *secundum artem*, and indeed I felt a foretaste of omniscience in my limited communications with my friend, which were otherwise a little like calling across the Styx to a departed ghost.

Another landmark, which had painful consequences for me in after life, was my discovery that I had a genius for the Fine Arts. This pernicious idea would never have crossed my mind, if a schoolfellow of mine named Jacox had not had another idea, nearly equally pernicious, that he had a genius for Satire. These two ideas fructified in Room K. which I fancy I have already referred to, under circumstances as follows:

In Room K., on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, a delusion was indulged in by boys willing to sacrifice two half-holidays in the week to self-deception, to the effect that they were being taught how to draw. A correlated delusion obsessed at the same time certain instructors, who were not Early Masters—at least on the morning of this occurrence. For they came late—late enough to allow of my making a crude sketch of the Farnese Hercules, with Jacox looking over my shoulder, before their authority ejected us from the premises, where neither had any business. I wish to Heaven that they had been earlier. Then Jacox might never have said:—"You know how to draw and no mistake, Pascoe!" I perceive, now that it is too late—near sixty years too late!—that he was, according to his lights, satirical. He had justification, however, in the widely spread belief that an exaggerated overstatement of the contrary is an effective form of ridicule. What he wished to convey was that I did not know how to draw, and probably never should. I doubt if I was able at that time to conceive myself incapable of anything, and I accepted his encomium seriously.

It was very natural. Tell any over-confident boy of fifteen that he has a strong bent for anything, and egotism will do the rest. Of course if the bias of his supposed genius is towards a subject which calls for a slight effort to acquire a rudiment of skill in its earliest manifestation, he has a better chance of escaping a misconception of his own latent abilities. He has to learn to play scales on the piano, at least, before it will occur to the most officious family friend to assure his parents that they have added to the world's musical wealth the germ of a Paderewski. He *must* learn musical notation to convince the most sanguine critic that

he is a Beethoven in embryo. No one will believe he is a mute in-glorious Soyer until he can cook a potato, that he is Robin Hood or William Tell until he hits something; or Tom Cribb or Nat Langham until he knocks some one down, or out. All these accomplishments—taken at random—call for an admission ticket to their outer court, for which the aspirant has, as it were, to pay cash. Even Poetry and the Drama demand spelling, and even grammar, though I confess I write this with diffidence.

It is otherwise when we have to deal with the Fine Arts. A piece of drawing-paper and a pencil are all that is necessary to show genius, and the less visible it is to a normal vision the greater the credit to his insight who detects it. And herein lies the difference between the painter's art and that of the musician, cook, marksman, or prize-fighter. No preliminary knowledge is necessary, and no authority can convict him of incompetence. If incompetency always broke its pencil-point, or sucked the vermilion, as some of us have done in early youth, authority would have something to lay hold of and could point out those disqualifications for the career of a Reynolds, a Michelangelo, or a Turner. But any moderately clever boy can get over these difficulties in a few hours, and is thereafter entrenched behind his genius as in a fortress where none can touch him. It is no use to tell him he has drawn a leg a mile long. It is the foreshortening that makes it look so, or the perspective, or it is your narrow-minded academical accuracy that prevents you entering into the ideal character of the work. Measurement, he will explain to you, is useless as a criterion of proportion, except on the picture itself, which is wet, and you must on no account touch it. Anyhow, he's right. Few of us have the hardihood to express opinions about colour to real artists, but now and then a meek voice rises in protest against emerald green eyes, and blackberry-juice lips, and is told that its owner is colour-blind. How can he know that he isn't? And when he points out that another real artist has painted the same original with emerald green lips and blackberry-juice eyes, he does not score a single run. Because that is interpretation. It is always a case of heads, Inspiration wins; tails, you lose. Respectful silence is always open to bystanders, whose consolation it must be to reflect that the most original and powerful neosophies may pass and be forgotten, unless they get vaguely mixed up with Belial, who never loses a chance of self-assertion.

However, the Mystery of Colour, with all its splendid openings for Popes in want of a job, had not offered itself as a resource for my infallibility when I first discerned in myself, at the suggestion

of friends, the materials of an Artist. That was a sad day for me when Jacox told me that I could draw and no mistake. If he had only put his tongue ever so tenderly in his cheek! . . . But it is no use talking about it. I did *not* detect his ironical method, and I did buy cartridge paper and a three-penny BB pencil, and a piece of India-rubber of the period, as I walked back from school, that very afternoon in the autumn of fifty-five. I promptly put the rubber to thaw in my breeches-pocket, and the moment I got home unrolled my sheet of cartridge paper, with a misgiving that it would not flatten out. It did not, but I drew Prometheus, in spite of the way the paper cockled with the vulture just beginning to think of where he would turn to in earnest, and his wings reaching all across the picture. I was dissatisfied with Prometheus, and tore him up.

Then I made acquaintance with a phenomenon which was to embarrass me greatly later in life. Every artist knows that the fragment of a destroyed picture speaks to the regretful spectator of a miracle of composition, vigorous draughtsmanship, delicate play of light and shade, solidity, tenderness, fancy—all the things!—lost for ever through the ruthless Vandalism of its destroyer. Any one can test this who possesses a work of Art that he has loathed from infancy—has placed in a lumber-room with its face to the wall because who can say but that some one, some day might like it, to have? Any portion of such a picture, produced in a society of real *connoisseurs*, will procure for him who has detached it execrations and contumely. And what is worse, he will himself be overwhelmed by a sudden perception of the Qualities of the miserable residuum, and will thereafter writhe with penitential anguish at the thought of the careful modelling of the torso and the atmosphere of the middle distance—lost, lost for ever! And all because he gave way to rashness, when he might at least have shown the Art Treasure to any really good Judge, who would have saved it for posterity.

My first experience of this phenomenon came to me when I tore Prometheus up; and did not, when I threw the pieces away, make a clean sweep of the whole lot. One remained, with the vulture's claw upon it. Varnish found it, and recognized it as the work of an Artist, whatever it represented. She exclaimed against my act of wanton destruction, but not so much on the score of its vandalism as because of the cost of the materials. Think of all that money gone, and nothing to show for it! Wherever I got the example from it went beyond her powers to imagine. Only one thing she was sure—it wasn't Master Moss! This, please note, was

not an expression of popular opinion about Judaism, which ascribes to it an exaggerated economy; but of faith in Cooky as an adviser. Nor yet it wasn't Miss Gracey, because she knew better. It was the corruption of man's heart. She referred the matter to Gracey, who was forthwith deceived by the surviving fragment into the recollection of conspicuous promise in the original which presently became masterly performance. "How ever could you be so silly, Jackey?" said Gracey, "as to spoil all that beautiful drawing? And all out of your own head, too!" Thereupon she and Varnish laid their wits together, and traced the bulk of Prometheus to a house-maid's box, where it was waiting to light her next fire, and the Titan's head to The Dust; and *that* filthy, one wondered Miss Gracey could touch it; the one being Varnish.

The flavour of Carbolie Acid that pervades this Infirmary—and every other, no doubt—dies in my nostrils at the bidding of Memory, to make way for a phantom of that whiff that came from The Dust as my intrepid little sister plunged into its penetralia with a candle, and identified the missing fragment among potato-peelings and some broken crockery which speculation may remain dumb about. That whiff makes me shudder still, near upon sixty years later. And when I see Gracey's bright triumphant face, and hear her voice exclaim that she has got it! And then her resurrection and surrender of the candlestick, and a search for foul floating cobwebs that had caught and clung to her hair, and tickled. But she had been touched by nothing else, having rescued the salvage with a cautious finger and thumb, and brought it out proudly to the light of Heaven, where it could be blown and shaken.

I ask my Self now, as I look back to that hour, was it really *he*, that spoiled young cub, who could even utter derision of that darling girl for going into that beastly dust-hole to resuscitate his rubbish? For he *did*, and all the while I was flattering him that the incident could be made capital of for our common glory. What could be more splendid than to despise and fling aside so powerful a manifestation of genius? What nobler than to undervalue it as a mere symptom of the great achievements that were to follow?

At the same time, I was still such a mere baby, so crude a product of a nursery and a school, that I, looking back, am fain to tolerate my Self—the Self of those days—even as my circle tolerated and encouraged its self-conceit and crudity.

But their forbearance and patience were my ruin. A little discipline might have saved me, and none was forthcoming. It happened unfortunately that my bent, to the top of which they fooled



me, was one in which the only sane and responsible guardian I had—my father to wit—was completely at sea. His easy-going modesty could form no judgment as to whether I had, or had not in me the stuff from which an artist can be made. When I followed up Prometheus with a heterogeneous muddle of unfinished designs, all of the most ambitious sort, none a scrap better than what any fairly clever self-confident boy could reel off by the score, he either mistrusted his own critical powers, or kept silence, borne down by the applause of well-meaning friends; who, when called upon to admire my latest marvellous productions, thought they were complying with his wish in perceiving in me the nascent germ of any and every great artist whose name they happened to remember. They went away and laughed at the ridiculous boy; that I do not doubt for a moment. But how was my dear father to know that I was not a Raphael in embryo, when every approach he made towards discussing my abilities as mortal, was quashed with assurances that the Fine Arts were not subject to any ascertainable laws—not to be discussed by the vulgar outsider on any intelligible lines, such as would be followed in the case of any other subject.

This, however, is outrunning my story. Let me get back to that filthy dust-bin, and Gracey, limping triumphantly up the kitchen stairs with the rescued Titan's head.

I am reminded that, on the way, our Cook was instructed to make paste of an exceptional tenacity, nothing that human power could detach from anywhere being held applicable to the purpose in hand. She made, I think, a quart. I condescended so far as to go out to a neighbouring oilman's and buy a pastebrush for two-pence, which moulted disgracefully, very soon reducing the quart of paste to a matrix full of hog's bristles. Enough remained, however, to reinstate the drawing on a cardboard backing, with only one or two holes in the sky, which did beautifully for clouds. As I write all I recollect, I must record that the paste was carefully covered over and consigned to a shelf, where it proceeded to become green mould. It was known thereafter as "the paste" and allowed to get worse for a long time on the plea that it might, after all, be wanted for something. It never was, and would have been found ineffectual and sickly, under its green mould, if it had been.

That evening when my father, having finished his pipe in his own room, joined the remainder of the family in the drawing-room, the first words he said were:—"Now let's see the great work of Art."

"There now!" said Gracey. "Jackey must have told. What a shame!" The explanation of which is, that during dinner, and



previously, hopes had been held out to my father of a privileged inspection of a rare production undescribed, the work of a near connection of the family, not specified. He had undertaken to possess his soul in peace until after pipe-time, but had broken his promise, inquiring of me in the library, where I was detecting the meaning of an obscure passage in Juvenal, what the fun was. I affected ignorance, and he explained, referring to expressions used at dinner. I said, as one who recalls what has merited oblivion:—"Oh—*that!* That was nothing. Only a rotten drawing I made of Prometheus."

"Well!" said my father, placidly smoking. "We'll see the rotten drawing, at any rate. Fine Arts!—that's our game, is it?" So, when we joined the ladies, we saw the rotten drawing, and its author felt that his position was the stronger since its disintegration and restoration. Could I have anticipated some later experiences, I should have discerned the cause of this, and given it a name. There is no doubt about it—it was the Quality it had acquired. In my innocence I then imagined that my position had been improved by false concepts in the Spectators' minds of what the splendour of the drawing was before I tore it up. But this was delusion. Quality was the responsible agent.

"Which did which?" said my father, under misapprehension as to the authorship. "Gracey the bird, and Jackey the statue? Or Jackey the bird, and Gracey the statue?"

"You dear, old, silly papa," said Gracey. "It's not a statue. It's Prometheus. And the Vulture gnawing at his liver, like in Shelley. And I didn't do any of it; Jackey did it *all*—all by himself, out of his own head, and nobody to help him! He did, indeed!"

My father glanced at his wife opposite, for confirmation. "I believe that is the case," said she. And her manner did not deny, at least, that "the case" was a remarkable one.

His response was:—"H'm!" And I discerned in the tone of each a sufficient confirmation of the wisdom of Jacox. My father then proceeded to examine details. "The vulture isn't gnawing his liver," said he. "His liver's on the other side."

"Would a vulture know?" said Gracey, thoughtfully, anxious about my fame for accuracy. "But, of course, they would have told him!" She seemed quite disconcerted on my behalf!

"It doesn't at all follow," said my father. "Anyhow, he would make preliminary prods. But why hasn't Prometheus got eyes? I should have preferred to *see* the Vulture, myself."

"Oh, papa dear, how *can* you? He *has* got eyes. Hasn't

he got eyes, Jackey? You did give him eyes, dear, didn't you?"

I was skulking at the other end of the room—a misinterpretation of a modest demeanour. "He's got Greek eyes," said I.

"Perfectly correct," said my father, with gravity. "And Greek hair, I suppose. In those days they had some consideration for the sculptors. And what's that going on in the sky? Greek fire?"

I took this quite seriously. "That's the sunset," I said. "Those are only holes. We've lost the pieces."

"Oh—they are holes. Very good. But what I want to know, young man, is—why did you tear it all up?"

"Because I thought it so beastly bad when it was done. I didn't want it stuck together again. It was Gracey's idea." I am conscious now of what an ungracious young cub I must have been, or seemed. I feel horribly ashamed as my young sister's animated face comes back to me, looking over my father's shoulder at the puerile drawing, courting the caressing hand that toys with her sunny curls, and lingers on her downy cheek, appreciatively. I say to myself in vain that it does not matter now, and I try to shield my heart against its penitence, behind the long decades that have come between, in vain.

But Gracey had no thought of blame for her cub-brother. Of that I am convinced. She was only thinking what a dear, clever boy he was, and rejoicing that she had rescued his precious work from that filthy dust-bin down below. "Now *do* say it's a lovely drawing, papa dearest!" said she. "Just think of Jackey doing it all himself, and in such a little time, too! And he's never done a drawing before! *Do* say so, and I'll give you such a nice kiss, exactly in the right place."

My father accepted a prepayment of the bribe, but I don't think he fulfilled the contract, though he appeared to assent to it. "I'll tell you just what I think, chick," said he. "Only it's not good for much when it's done—because it's not my line. I think that, considering that it is the work of a young gentleman who never did a drawing before, and that he took such a little time over it, and further, that it is done under some embarrassing Greek conditions which I can't profess to understand."

"Yes. Considering all that, you think it's lovely. Now, don't you?"

"Well—considering all that, I think the drawing might have been worse." With which very modest concession to his son's greatness, my father escaped, that time.

I have sometimes thought very leniently of my stepmother for her share in hurrying me on to destruction. Because, although she conceded to me abstract ability of a high order—and we must remember that it is as much as one's life is worth to attempt to stem High Art—so long as no question was raised of its adoption as a profession, yet as soon as a murmur of Destiny was reported to the effect that I was “going to be” an Artist, she took up her parable on the score of Caste, and denounced Art the profession, however High on the slopes of Parnassus, as socially low, and altogether unsuited for the son of a Gentleman. For, strange as it seems now to tell it, there were still, in the fifties, persons in Society who grudged admission to its sacred precinct to every Art but Literature. The Élite—so said a Gospel that had survived from the last age but one—might be amateurs, like Count d'Orsay, but not professionals. And this Gospel was preached with the greatest vigour by persons on Society's outskirts, who, indeed, are apt to take up the cudgels in defence of its citadel even while the garrison is contemplating all sorts of mean concessions to the enemy.

No prophet was at hand to tell my stepmother that in twenty years' time the Upper Circles would make a general stampede into the Lower ones—that the parts of tinkers, tailors, ploughboys, and apothecaries would be played by Gentlemen, who had never before stooped lower than soldiers, sailors, and thieves. And Jemima was all the more in need of a Daniel to read this writing on the wall—and plenty more for that matter—insomuch as that her position before marriage had been quite low and vulgar. Solicitude that her stepson should not imperil the Gentility—whatever it might amount to—that he had inherited from an attenuated ancestry, was graceful in an ex-governess, on her promotion. Not that she could not claim kinship of Aberllynponty-stradrindod, or somewhere thereabouts, only she thought all this Ancestry was such nonsense. But a line had to be drawn, and persons who belonged to a class which offered peculiar difficulties to exact nomenclature in plain language, but which, nevertheless, was instantly recognizable on its merits, had decided to draw that line at Art. No Gentleman's son—she would have to use the word in the end, one always had—could become a Working Artist without loss of Caste.

I overheard a conversation to this effect, and became a little confused about the Farnese Hercules, from whose cast I had drawn the sketch that had led to it. Mrs. Walkinshaw understood, however, and applauded Jemima's social views to the echo.

Somebody must have told me that this good lady, then or thereabouts, expressed the opinion that dear Mrs. Pascoe had all along seemed—well, she knew no other expression!—as if she belonged to, she supposed she must not say the better class, because that was odious, but to some section of the population which made the speaker concentrate her discriminative powers forcibly without result, and left her hearer, whoever she was, nevertheless fully informed about her meaning, and intensely perceptive of dear Mrs. Pascoe's qualifications which it indicated. I say some one must have told me this, or I should not have known it.

This protest against serious acceptance of Art as my destiny, which makes me slow to condemn Jemima as a principal among those whose good intentions decided my adoption of it as a profession, must have come about long after the incident of Prometheus, as I had added to it a long series of other evidences of my genius—one worse than the other, I should say—before my father allowed himself to travel with the stream in the direction of the quagmire of Modern Art in which it and I were to stagnate. The discussion of whether I should or should not “be an Artist” was prolonged through my last year of school life, and a short two years of attendance at College, before a final decision became necessary.

I told my Self, when I took up the writing of these memories that many of them would be painful. But I did not anticipate that the record of my adventures and misadventures in my profession would prove so. I thought of them as a farce, the recalling of which might amuse its writer, but could never sting him so many years after the curtain fell on its last scene. I find now that the farce was a tragedy. If I could think, as others do, of human life as the work of a well-intentioned Creator, I should have to concoct an excuse for his mismanagement of my career by supposing that he wanted to make an example of the consequences of presumptuous vanity and shallow lack of purpose, and considered me a worthless young jackanapes suitable for the object he had in view. I have so long ceased to perplex my soul with thoughts beyond its reach—to my gain, for I no longer “quake in my disposition”—that I conceive it more reasonable to divide the blame among those who visibly deserve it, my Self in chief. What was he about, not to turn upon me with reproaches—not to warn me that I could not trust his preposterous confidence in my own fatuous performances? I am glad that as I write this I am alone—that none can read it and make it the text of a sermon on Free Will and Necessity. I could



not stop it by telling him the Will is to me free of hypothesis, since Freedom is not known to me except as a quality of the Will. He would not understand me in that, nor probably in anything else.

And whom can I blame now, except my Self? Not Gracey, when the dear girl's only motive was her love and admiration for, and her confidence in, her younger brother. Not my father, whose only fault was that he mistrusted his own judgment in a subject that was to him a *terra incognita*, a land without a sign-post. Not Varnish, who to the best of my belief regarded Art and Science as forms of Nonsense, which well-informed people had every right to indulge in; only they could hardly expect sensible, uneducated persons to countenance them. Not my stepmother, as she scarcely came into Court as an Art-Critic, and certainly discouraged my adventure on social grounds, which I despised, but which I recognize now as ill-handled lifeboats. Not my sister Ellen, who was negative on all opinions, but shrank from unwelcome perplexities of every sort, saying:—"Oh dear! If only they would settle it one way or the other, and then perhaps we should get a little peace!" Not, therefore, any of my family. . . . Stop, though! I have not mentioned Roberta. She did *not* encourage me, I know. But what can I recollect? Almost nothing.

Of course, plenty were to blame, outside my family circle. I could reproach—nay, murder—Mrs. Walkinshaw, for her share in the arrangement of my destiny. At the time, I felt a spirit of Christian forgiveness stirring in my heart—forgiveness for gushes untold, untellable—when I found that the excellent lady's wild cries of approbation, overheard by me afar, had been provoked by the presentation for her inspection of a drawing of Milton's *Allegro*, unfinished, a recent production of the master. She had greeted it with a yell, to the effect that this was Correggio—so Gracey told me after. When I entered the drawing-room, she greeted me as Correggio Himself. I felt ready to condone many previous raptures, in view of this new discovery. If I could summon her from the grave now—she would only be a hundred and fifteen, about—I could murder her and pack her off to her coffin again, without remorse, so keenly have I since resented the mischief she did me by her gross flattery. But I doubt if my father paid much attention to Mrs. Walkinshaw.

I had one adviser outside my family to whom he might, with advantage to my welfare, have paid more—namely, my old school friend. But I must in justice say that I doubt if Cooky spoke freely to him. I fancy I remember referring to the extraor-



dinary ascendancy which Gracey exercised over Cooky. I was fully aware at the time of that young college man's doubts—however temperately he expressed them—of the reality of what every one else was a-hailing as an extraordinary development of youthful genius. But I had no means of knowing what I afterwards suspected, and indeed ultimately knew, that Gracey had laid an embargo, backed with the full force of her blue-eyed earnestness, on his free speech to my father.

To me, he would speak freely enough. I remember well, when my powerful rendering of Jove's vengeance on the Titan was ready to burst upon an astonished Universe, that Cooky, on a visit to The Retreat one Sunday morning, as of old, found that impressive work of Art with its face to the wall—for I had had doubts whether to court indiscriminate publicity for it—and turned it round to the light for inspection and explanation.

"What's all this, little Buttons?" said he. "What's the fun?"

"Oh—*that!*" said I, with a lame pretence that it was, as it were, a chance production of a thoughtless moment, easily forgotten. "That's only a piece of beastly foolery."

"That all?" said Cooky. "I guessed it was something of that sort. What jolly long legs you've given him! Who's the party? Prometheus, I suppose. Because of the Vulture."

I had secretly hoped that Cooky would censure my estimation of the work, and instead of that he appeared to have accepted it. "Of course, it's Prometheus," said I with dignity. "Nobody else has vultures."

"Not they!" said Cooky. "They know better. He wouldn't have had his'n if he'd had his choice. But he doesn't look put out enough about it. P'raps, though, that's because the Vulture hasn't begun?"

"The Titans," I said, "were Demigods."

"I see," said Cooky. "Of course, they could stand anything."

I did not feel that this treatment of the subject was respectful. I was hurt, and showed pique. "I don't care about it," said I. "I think I shall tear it up and chuck it away."

"What's the good of doing anything, little Buttons, if you're going to tear it up and chuck it away the minute you lose your temper?"

"I haven't lost my temper."

"Very well, then—make his legs a little shorter, and he'll be all right. And I say——"

"Whaw-awt?"

"Couldn't you manage to make him squirm a little. Because,

you know, little Buttons, a Vulture is a Vulture, put it how you may!"

"No, I *can't*. I can't alter him now. It's too late. He won't rub out. No—I shall chuck him away, and do another." Which came to pass, but not before Cooky's departure that evening. I think he told Gracey of our interview and my intention, and that enabled Gracey to identify the Vulture's claw through the Quality which the surface had acquired during some hours passed face-down on the carpet.

I have just recollected Roberta's reception of the revelation of my genius. It happened some months after her absurd runaway marriage, which fixes its date as in the spring following. It recalls what else I might easily have forgotten—the young woman's audacity when she returned from her honeymoon abroad. I must submit to the vagaries of Memory, and allow her to lead me back to a late autumn morning, which I can only identify as close to Guy Fawkes Day, but not Guy Fawkes Day. I do this because as the image of a four-wheeled cab becomes clear at the gate of The Retreat, I am also aware of the voice of our servant Raynes reproaching a Guy with being an Anachronism, saying that he was an imposition, to claim a half-penny for inability to see why Gunpowder Treason should pass and be forgotten on any day in the year but one. The youth of his constituents—he was of the plural number; his soul, or core, being carried on a chair to which it had to be tied owing to imperfect stuffing—must have excused this. For he had got a hoyp'ny, which might have been more had he been historically accurate, and was imposing on the Protestantism of the Illingsworths by the time the four-wheeler arrived at our gate, and its contents were discussing whether they should come in, or should leave their cards and be wafted to some other scene temporarily, until my father returned home. For Raynes said that Master was late, but couldn't be long now.

"Oh," said Roberta, perceiving me at this point, "it's you! It's the boy, Anderson . . . Oh, very well—only don't crush my lace!" This arose from an impression I had that my sister, returning to her family under these circumstances, would want to be kissed, however conventionally. I very nearly said:—"I don't want to kiss you," because it would have been so true. But I practised self-restraint, and Roberta continued:—"How long will Papa be? That's the point. Because I won't come in if he isn't here! That's flat!"

In my heart I cordially wished the newly wedded pair would go away anywhere else, and postpone themselves indefinitely. So

I would say nothing to encourage them to stop. I decided on:—"The Governor's got a Committee and a Board Meeting and an Investigation of Accounts, and he didn't say how late he'd be. Awfully late, I expect." I chose the functions that were to detain him quite at random from an assortment overheard during the past three years. Roberta accepted them as possible or probable; but then she knew as little as I did about such things.

"Very well, then," said Roberta. "If Papa isn't in, I don't see the use of coming in. Is Ellen in?"

I denied Ellen sufficiently—she being always an indistinct feature of family life—by implication. "Varnish is in," I said. "And Miss Evans is in, if you come to that."

"He's talking about Mrs. Pascoe," said my sister to her lord and master, who—as I then suspected, and later became convinced—was as wax in her hands, and looked to her for guidance in all things. "He may call her Miss Evans all day long if he likes. I shan't stop him. Now look here, Eustace John, you've got to give our love . . . Yes—I know quite well. Anderson. I know what I'm talking about, so don't fidget!" I was dimly conscious of my new-made brother-in-law struggling to make his individuality felt from beneath a crinoline. Probably no one who has never shared a cab with a lady in equivalent skirts can know how hopeless this task was, in those days. Mr. Grayper remained in compulsory abeyance, and his better-half proceeded—"Yes—give our loves. Never mind what *he* says! Give our loves to Papa, and . . . and *not* to Miss Evans, as you call her." . . .

I do not know how it came about that the lady herself, unperceived till then, was standing close behind me. I suppose I made no inquiry at the time, and now I have to accept her position under the gate-lamp as a fact, and to be content with it. There she was, and there was her equable voice, saying:—"Do as you like, Bertie dear. Call me 'Miss Evans' if it gives you any pleasure. Only don't go away and disappoint your dear father. If you had any idea how anxious you made him!"

She stopped with a jerk, I think, because Roberta's manner was too insistently repellent to allow of negotiations; then continued without irritation:—"Oh—well—if you must, you must! Or stop a minute—look here now!—won't this do? If I go upstairs and keep out of the way? You shall have the drawing-room all to yourselves! Honour bright!"

I became conscious of an abraded head, at odds with skirts, a head involved with vortices of pleats and gores and gussets

and gathers. Its mouth was trying to articulate:—"I say now, Ro, don't!" Wherein I discerned this young gentleman's private abbreviation of his wife—one we had never used at home.

"Don't what?" said she, looking for him in her rear, struggling with her concomitants. "Don't speak plainly, I suppose?"

"No—don't be such a Turk. Get along down and go in! I don't see anythin' to be gained by rows. Let's go in and be reasonable! You heard what Mrs. Pascoe said."

My stepmother saw her opportunity and caught at it. A traitor in the enemy's camp! "Thank you so much, Mr. Grayper, for taking my part a little! How do you do?" She had captured his right hand, kid glove and all, with her beautiful ungloved one, before any sort of protest was possible. I felt that Jemima was more than a match for my sister. Besides, she was wielding that powerful weapon, forgiveness, which ensures a dance on the body of one's prostrate foe after the battle.

Circumstances had placed the new-married lady at a disadvantage. Merely having to let her husband out of a coop, to shake hands, compromised her case. She descended from the cab pale, with a bitten lip, and remained stony towards her *bête noire*: though, I confess, I felt she would not have weakened her case by tolerating a ceremonial kiss. As it was, Jemima's:—"Very well, dear! I won't ask you to kiss me till you feel like it," rather strengthened that lady's position than otherwise.

My father's return was close upon our heels as we entered the house. He, in fact, was shaking hands with his son-in-law on the doorstep when Roberta was following her obnoxious stepmother into the drawing-room.

I went back. Mr. Grayper was trying his hand on apologetic semi-penitence, and had evidently been preparing a speech. But he was so terribly handicapped by the fact that he could only exculpate himself by blaming his wife that he made a complete hash of it. His stammering was excellent in itself, but whenever it took articulate form he had to qualify whatever meaning had leaked out with so many reservations that his words might quite as well have been left unspoken. I can recollect nothing except that he was well aware of an immense number of things, that he yielded to no one in a considerable number of others, that his respect and love for my father were unbounded, and that the first and whole duty of manhood in respect of its marital arrangements was deference towards the feelings of its *fiancé's* families . . . but! Recollection stops here, and I doubt whether, if the young gentleman did go on with the exception to which

his conjunction pointed, he got very far with it. For it was difficult to introduce the point that, in spite of his punctilios, he had suddenly and without warning married by special license a young lady whose family circle had no intention of throwing obstacles in the way of a normal and reasonable union.

My father, I think, enjoyed his confusion, letting him run into all sorts of quickset hedges and morasses of eloquence. Then his constitutional good-nature got the better of him, and he helped the unhappy man out of his misery. "Well—well—well!" said he, getting himself clear of a thick overcoat—for the year was cooling fast—and then, as he found a hook to hang it on, adding as though a happy thought had struck him:—"Look here, my boy! I've got a good idea. Suppose we say no more about it—eh!" Mr. Grayper, whom my father's speech makes me remember as quite a young man—no older than my sister, in fact—seemed to me to welcome the supposition greedily, seizing my father's hand and holding it gratefully. But he gave up the attempt to utter something; gratitude, I conceive. He seemed, however, to breathe much more freely, and after hanging up his own coat, followed my father into his library.

My father's expression always told me whether my company was desired, or otherwise, and this time I accepted an eye-lid-signal of the slightest sort, and left him to discuss the position with his new-found son-in-law. I was curious to know how Jemima and my sister were getting on, and made for the drawing-room. Voices were at tension-point within. I opened the door gently, to give them every chance of intercepting an intruder. If, incidentally, this gentle opening was unheard and I caught a few bars of the conversation within, was it my fault? I missed something my stepmother was just ending on, but I heard the answer.

"Whatever I think, I shall say nothing. What can I prove? It is only my own belief. You know the truth—yes, your conscience knows the truth, Helen Evans! How can any one else *know*? You say you will repeat what I say to Papa, but I know better. You will do nothing of the sort. How could you look him in the face, pray?"

The reply had a sort of despairing tone:—"Oh, Bert, Bert, can it be you, to say such a dreadful thing of me? Think what friends we have been!" This was appealing: what followed had a sound of self-defence. "And you are so inconsistent. Never to say a single word to me all the time we have been here in Chelsea! . . . No—you never said one word till after our wedding——"

My sister cut her off sharply, striking in with:—"Because I



had no reason. I never knew your motive. . . . Is that door open?" I judged it best at this point to complete the opening of the door, and go into the room. Both accepted me as a passer-by. Roberta said:—"Well, Eustace John, what do *you* want? Get it and go." And my stepmother said:—"Yes, we're talking." I thought it best to be ephemeral, and find a book to have been in want of. Besides, it was a little pretence that soothed my conscience for a peccadillo; really, I had been just on the point of coughing ostentatiously to announce my presence. When I left them I closed the door honourably, and the talking began again.

Gracey's knock at the street-door—which I knew well—intercepted a half-formed intention on my part to try for admission into the library, and hear what was going on there. It was quite amicable, as an occasional laugh showed. I varied my programme, not an imperative one, on the appearance of Gracey, who had been out on a shopping excursion with Ellen, whose constitutional indecision of character disqualified her for shopping single-handed. She could not decide on a purchase without an adviser, her demeanour in a shop resembling that of a Laputan sage whose flapper had gone for a holiday. I answered the door—that was the accepted phrase—and was called upon to account for the cab that still browsed at our gate, content with sixpence every fifteen minutes till further notice. That cab was, I said, Bert in new togs, and her booby, as large as life. She was jawing with Jemima in the drawing-room, and her booby was jawing with the Governor in the library. If, I said, Ellen and Gracey liked jaw, an opportunity now offered itself for glutting themselves therewith to repletion. I myself, being sick of human folly—I forget how I put this point—should go and see Varnish, and get some tea. Varnish was always good for tea in the late afternoon. Moreover, I wanted my old nurse's views on the conversation I had overheard.

A human bride, however she has been brought about, is always a *bonne bouche* for her sisters, and Ellen and Gracey rushed tumultuously to the drawing-room to greet theirs. I heard their *accolade* and felt that a provisional peace would hold good between Roberta and her stepmother. I found Varnish on the landing, listening curiously. "Why, Master Jackey," said she. "I do declare if it isn't Miss Roberta and young Mr. Grayper, back again!"

"It just is," I said. "And I say, Varnish, look here! Come in and shut the door." The door, that is, of Varnish's reserve, a room off the landing. "I say—what do you think? Bert and Jemima were having it out when I went into the drawing-room."

“Ark at you, Master Eustace, saying *Jemima*! What would anybody think, to hear you! Such a way of going on, I never!”

“Nobody’s any the worse, that I can see.”

“Because nobody ever listens to young gentlemen. They’re just let have their way. On’y—*Jemima*! Such a name to call by!”

“Well—what’s she to be called? Mary Ann? Eliza Jane?”

Varnish was driven to stand at bay, face to face with a perplexing problem. “Both of ’em more respeckful than *Jemima*, anyhow!” said she, “but people’s own names are what they look to be called by, so why not behave according?”

“What’s her’s?”

“Now, Master Jackey, you know that, every bit as well as me.” But Varnish flinched from prescribing “Mrs. Pascoe” for my use, definitely. She edged away to seek some compromise. “Of course, it would have made it more easy like if she could have kep’ Miss Evans for a bit.” That is to say, if the designation could have held good, in the privacy of family life, until some better one presented itself. “In course,” continued Varnish, reflectively, “she is your stepmamma, and the young ladies’.”

I immediately seized this solution by the forelock. “Very well, then! Bert and her stepmar were having it out, hammer and tongs, when I went into the drawing-room.”

I escaped from complete submission to an obnoxious title by a slight perversion of it and a contemptuous accent. I added that they had shut up now, because of Ellen and Gracey, but that they would begin again when the girls came upstairs and might go on till Doomsday.

Varnish’s curiosity seemed roused. “You never took account of what they were saying, I lay,” said she.

“Didn’t I, rather?” said I. I then repeated exactly the conversation I had just heard, with all the confidence of a shrewd young memory. I ascribe my clear recollection of it now to its duplication at the time, for Varnish’s benefit.

It is an instance of how things the stupidity of boyhood accepted without comment come back to me in maturity to baffle investigation of their causes, that I took Varnish’s cross-examination, as to my recollection of these chance words I had overheard, as a matter of course. Later on in life, when I have pondered over this story of my father’s second marriage, I have thought to myself—what would I not give for speech once again with dear old Varnish, long dead, to ask her what was passing in her mind, that she should be so keen to know every word that passed between Roberta and her stepmother. As it is, I can only recall that

her demeanour outwent the occasion I conceive for it now. Her long silences, broken by interjections, as:—"Mercy me!" or:—"There now, to think of it!"; her tense abstraction of mind, always coming back to a request to have some phrase or sentence repeated; the visible ill-success of her attempts to reconcile one such with another—all seem, as I look back to them, to have reference to some train of thought she would not communicate to me; that I, at the time, never suspected. As time passes on, and I, with memory at fault, and no resource of written documents to go back to, feel that the thread that holds me to the past grows more attenuated day by day, I have to be content with the belief that has done duty for certainty for so many years—all a long lifetime!—that she thought my stepmother's marriage with my father was schemed by her from the day when my mother was laid in the grave, and that it was no subject for open speech with a mere boy. Yet I was old enough even then to scent manhood ahead, on the watch to pervert all my healthy natural instincts, and make me the slave of the World's conventions. I cannot see why the young should not be trusted more with a knowledge of their own fast-coming ambitions and passions. Better surely than to launch them on the sea of life, without chart or compass, to find out its shoals for themselves.

Apart from that, I cannot now see that even if Jemima had acknowledged to herself her *penchant* for my father, during my mother's lifetime, she was so very much to blame. After all, one is human, oneself.

But I have to recollect that all this incident of Roberta's return was recalled to me by my reference to her opinions about my artistic achievements, and these came to her knowledge months after. I might dwell longer upon it, and upon the uncomfortable evening that followed—for the happy couple sent the cab away, and stopped on—but that very little of it survives in my mind, and that does not tempt me to remember more. I prefer to get back to my memories of the dawn of Art.

Roberta and her husband drifted away from us, which may have been partly owing to their starting housekeeping, in a villa at Petersham. It was a good distance from Wandsworth, where the Brewery was; but not so very much farther, when you came to think of it, than the young man's mother's house at Roehampton. It was, however, at least a hundred miles from Chelsea, measured by the only accurate gauge of distance, imagination. The consequence was that, as Petersham kept its distance from Chelsea, my sister Grayper seldom came near her family. I rather

think that she had not done so for near upon three months, when one day Gracey took advantage of a visit from her to leave a portfolio, in which she had enshrined—if the expression is not too strong—some important examples of my work, on the drawing-room table near her, in a manner to invite inspection. Her sister may have felt curiosity to know its contents—for in the fifties people did—about portfolios and books and things. Nowadays the side-tapes of the former are, like the young lady of Ryde's shoestrings, seldom untied.

On this occasion Roberta took the offered bait, asking Gracey what she had got in that new portfolio. It looked a very good one. How much was it? The price of it nearly elbowed its contents out of Court.

Gracey said:—"Never mind! *Do* you want to see what's in it or not? That's the question?"

Said Roberta, superciliously:—"What *have* you got in it? Oh, drawings!"

"What did you expect, Bert?" said Gracey. "Flatfish!" Whereupon Ellen, near at hand, remarked:—"How silly you are, Gracey! You know flatfish are impossible, in portfolios." Gracey said she didn't see that; but then that was only her contradictoryness. It had, however, the effect of rousing speculation in Ellen's mind as to the possibility of flatfish in portfolios, and she kept up thereafter a sort of Greek Chorus on the subject, which lasted out the interview.

"Have I got to admire these?" said Roberta, turning them over with disrespectful rapidity. "Who did them? Your Jew. I suppose?"

"That's a bad shot!" I was looking out of a distant window, affecting abstraction, as I contributed this remark. "Cooky doesn't go in for this sort of humbugging."

"Oh—that's the boy!" said Roberta. "What sort of humbugging does Cooky, as you call him, go in for?"

I muttered a statement in reply, which Gracey interpreted to Europe. "Mathematics and Music," said she. "Monty has no turn for Art."

"Then who did them? The boy, I suppose? Well—they're very bad!"

"Oh, Bert, how can you be so unkind?" Thus Gracey, hurt and disappointed, but not quite sure that such a preposterous criticism should be taken seriously.

The Greek Chorus was going on, *obligato*. I believe it was saying:—"If the fish were ever so thin, three of them would be

too thick for any portfolio. And no Holland flaps could possibly prevent their getting out, if they were alive. So it's no use."

"I didn't say fish in earnest, Ell," said Gracey. "It was only a way of speaking."

"I think it was a very silly way. I think the sooner you leave off speaking in such ways, the better. Because it isn't witty, whatever you think." It is just possible Memory has dressed up and exaggerated my poor, dear sister Ellen's method. But really, the conviction that the foregoing, or some equivalent, is what she *must* have said, is irresistible.

Roberta was turning over the drawings, commenting:—"Have these things been shown to any one who knows about drawing? They ought to be shown to an Artist, a real one, if his opinion is to have any weight. I think them very bad, but then, I'm not a Judge."

The Greek Chorus continued:—"That's exactly what I say. But, oh dear, it's no use! Nobody ever listens to me, and Gracey talks nonsense about fishes in a portfolio. I give up." Ellen was very near the truth in one thing. No one ever did listen to her.

Roberta on this occasion did not. She went on, as though no Greek Chorus existed:—"Why not ask Mrs. Walkinshaw. She's considered a Judge, I know. Anyhow, she knows real Artists, with Studios. She knows Gromp, certainly, if she knows nobody else."

I had never heard the name of the great man she referred to. It wasn't really Gromp; however, Gromp impresses as his did. The real name I have forgotten, in spite of the fact that my soul, as it were, rose to it, acknowledging its owner as the highest human authority on things Artistic. Even so when some person of weight says, of a patient who has been pronounced a sufferer from Polysyllabitis:—"He must have the best advice. He must see Smilax, at once!" one feels that Smilax, of whom one has never heard before, spells salvation for any sufferer from such a complex disorder. I was a stranger to the name of Gromp, but when I felt that he had been actual, though I knew him not, my ignorance of him began to have the force of knowledge. Retrospectively, I recognized Gromp. But I was afraid of him, for all that.

"Of course," said I. "I shall have to do something heaps better than *those* things, before they can be shown to a Swell." A hurried vision passed through my mind of a really great design of Chaos, Tartarus, Erebus, The Fall of Satan, the last Judg-



ment—something really powerful that would convince the Swell, and reveal me in my true light. I was disconcerted at Roberta's attitude. "You'll *have* to do something heaps better, young man," said she drily, and wanted to talk about something else.

I was dissatisfied, as I felt that not only my abilities, but my modesty, should receive acknowledgment. I am sorry to say I saw no way of bringing it on the tapis except by vilipending Gracey's judgment. "It isn't *my* idea," said I. "Only Gee would buy a portfolio for 'em, and stick 'em in." Gee was Gracey, indicated by her initial. The dear girl had bought the portfolio out of her pocket money, and I used it as a fulcrum for a spurious self-abasement. Rather in fear that my humility would be accepted, I thought it best to emphasize it—as it seemed to me—beyond all reason, so as to ensure its repudiation. "*I* think them rot," said I, with decision.

"So do I," said Roberta, unexpectedly. "However, don't believe *me*. Ask any Judge. Ask Gromp. Get Goody Walkinshaw to give you an introduction to her Gromp, *if* she knows him. I don't believe she knows him."

I believe the Greek Chorus was still dealing with the fishes, but this speech brought her again into touch with humanity. "I do *not* see, Bert," said Ellen, "why you are so nasty about Mrs. Walkinshaw. She may not be a Judge, but at any rate she comes of a very old Lincolnshire family, and one of them was beheaded under Henry the Somethingth—I forget which—and another was Sir Stephen Walkinshaw, known as The Apostate, and really History. And whatever she has done to deserve to be Goodied, I cannot imagine. As if she was a Hag!" And so forth.

If my father had come into the room two minutes later, Roberta would have given up her portfolio—that sounds Parliamentary—and it would have been laid on the table—so does that—where it belonged, near the window. But, as it happened, he entered the room just as she was saying:—"Well—Hag or no Hag, she can be asked about Gromp, and she can back out if it was fibs." One is not obliged to bring down family speech to standard probability, in writing what is never to be read! So I leave my sisters' phrases untinkered.

My father, patriarchally good-humoured, accepted them, but asked for elucidation. "Who's been telling fibs about Gromp, and what is Gromp she told fibs about?" Being enlightened, he said:—"But Gromp's a royal Academician! One couldn't ask a Royal Academician about pencil drawings." This seemed so plausible—I don't know why—that Gromp went into abeyance, to

crop up later. My sister's husband, who had come in with my father, began looking at my drawings, and put his foot in it forthwith, being shut up, or down, by his wife. If he had confined himself to holding them at a distance, and leaning his head to right and left to foster art-visibility—let the word stand!—his position would have been comparatively safe. But he must needs say they were not half-bad, considering! Whereupon, Roberta said tartly:—"Then I shouldn't consider, if I were you!"

But Gromp was not destined to disappear. The next time the Hag was to the fore, she broached him, claiming a life-long intimacy. In fact, she suggested that only the fascinations of her departed Walkinshaw had stood between herself and Gromp at the Altar. Whereby, Gromp, unable to meet with charms like hers elsewhere, had become a non-marrying man, and lived chiefly on hard-boiled eggs and milk in a Studio that had been a dissenting chapel at Clapham Rise. He never saw a living soul, and admitted no one within its walls, but a letter from her would be Open Sesame—would operate like magic. My father had only to say the word, and she would make an appointment for him with this Royal Academician, even with Gromp.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

I WAS not destined to see Gromp in the flesh for a long time after. He had to live on hard-boiled eggs for another clear twelve-month yet before I experienced that satisfaction. For my father put his foot down firmly on every attempt to bring the Fine Arts into the arena of serious discussion as a profession for his son, until I had finished my course at school, and attended lectures for at least a year at the College. Even with that delay I should still be short of nineteen—scarcely old enough to make the choice of a profession compulsory.

I think my father's imagination was misled by the word College. He could not dissociate it from his old University life, with its intoxicating traditions of ancient learning; its freedom of sacred precincts where every stone brings back its memories of bygone scholars; its great silent libraries, whose peace alone is stimulus enough to make an otherwise bookless man read out the day, and part reluctantly in the end with the quarto or folio he never would have looked into elsewhere. He had never known how much of his own love for the classics was due to the associations of the spot where they had reached his soul, and he fancied that his son too might be bitten with the love of Literature, or, it may be, of the practice of thinking—mathematical or scientific thinking—by the surroundings of a College. But, honestly as I believe that there was not in the world, in my time, a sounder curriculum of learning than the one he offered me, it had one defect. There was nothing in the places of study, in their antecedents and surroundings, to catch and hold the imagination of a crude boy, who, behind his many faults—which I do not think my words conceal—had one predominant impulse of the mind, which was ready to grasp good or evil, truth or falsehood, according to the garb it came in. My year of College life—in no sense Collegiate life—placed the banquet of learning before me ungarished and colourless, and my father wondered why the dishes that had tempted his intellectual palate in the library or the gardens of Peterhouse should be tasteless to his son's in Gower Street. Surely, a College is a College, wherever chance has placed it. He attached no weight whatever to University residence, as

against home and daily attendance. Of what advantage was it to a studious youth to be shut out of his College after hours? Would any amount of gating make study acceptable to an unstudious one? No—it was manifestly my natural aversion to letters, developed as soon as application to them became optional; for that was a condition precedent of College-manhood, no longer schoolboy-hood. And lore, artificially injected into the recesses of an unwilling brain, under a pumping force of Black Books and Impositions, would be rejected by that stomach of the intellect at the first convenient opportunity. Whereas my propensity to drawing incidents of Greek Mythology and English History, however fatuous its results were, was judged by him to be possibly the result of an inherent energy of the soul, the vapidty and awkwardness of whose first developments only needed guidance to make it bear rich crops of fruit, with—said Hope—opulence and fame for its possessor.

Nevertheless, it was evidently a point which he could not decide on his own responsibility. Even Mrs. Walkinshaw's squeal of rapture, when Gracey showed her with delight my design of Narcissus, in the boat of Charon, detecting his image in the waters of Styx, could not move him from his decision to mistrust his own judgment. He gave way, however, thus far, that he would send me to a real School of Art, where I should have Training; and if Training should train me effectually, and make him feel that Art was not an Ignis Fatuus, but a substantial reality, he would accompany me armed with the first evidence of that substantial reality, into the august presence of Gromp, or a congener, and act on such advice as might be vouchsafed to him.

Meanwhile, my stepmother was unconsciously advancing the interests of the Ignis Fatuus. How fortunate it is, by the by, that I have no one to satisfy but my Self! Think how smug and tidy metaphor would have had to become, under the rod of Publication! In her anxiety that the gentility of my forbears should not be dragged through the mire by my adoption of an ungentle profession, she never perceived that every lament she uttered over the degrading of his race biased my father towards approval of a Jack-o'-Lantern, whose guidance he only mistrusted because its follower might be landed in the mire of poverty. For his common-sense told him that the World would never lack respect for monetary success; and, granting that, that its most pernicious snobberies would drive a coach-and-six through the usages and distinctions his wife vouched for, of which he himself knew little enough, and cared to know less.

"Tush, Jacky boy!" said he to me one day, when I had summed up some reports of conversation by ascribing to my stepmother the words:—"All Artists are cads." "We're all cads at this shop. Your father, my dear boy, is a ruined stock-jobber. His old friend who is coming to dinner tonight is an auctioneer, and your great chum is a low, vulgar Jew." I remember this almost word for word, and that he added reflectively:—"It is worthy of remark that Nebuchadnezzar's race had been going it with kings and massacres and—and the most aristocratic conduct generally, two or three thousand years before William the Norman founded De-brett." My father's figures were loose, and his designation of Cooky was dictatedly a schoolboy rhyme rather than historical warrant. My impression is that its hero is inaccurately described, and I cannot conceive that any good authority bears out the statement of his very unaristocratic conduct. I must ask Mr. Turner about this—the first point, I mean; neither point being either here or there. What is to the purpose is that the more stress my stepmother laid on the desirability of a respectable profession for her stepson, the more leniently my father seemed to look upon the one which, as she alleged, was little short of disreputable.

"Somebody else must settle all that part of the job," said he. "Somebody that knows. I honestly confess that I have never met a gentleman in my life. . . . Well—I've never met a he male who answered to all the specifications! A gentleman never sneers, nor swears, nor spits. I'm sure I could find chapter and verse for all three, and I'm equally sure—though I can't advance proof—that I never knew any chap that didn't do either one or other of them. Just you take notice of the next man you meet that doesn't swear or spit, and see if he doesn't sneer. I'm not vouching for anything—I'm only suggesting guides to observation. Besides, I'm told a gentleman always keeps his word." My father paused, with retrospection written on his face, then concluded:—"No—I'm convinced that I have never met a gentleman in my life, not a real one!"

"It's only Papa's nonsense!" said Gracey. "He knows perfectly well that all his friends keep their words."

"They don't," said my father. "Not if nobody else hasn't overheard their words. I mean not unless somebody else has. And then not unless you remind 'em of it."

"I call that silly," said Gracey. "Because it's so little trouble to remind anybody of anything."

"I feel," said my father, "that the conversation is getting out



of my depth, possibly out of its own. Chuck me a walnut, and the crackers."

My stepmother always kept silence during sporadic discussions by the family of this subject, as she did on this after-dinner occasion. Her relation to the question was too real, too fraught with responsibility to Society, her husband, and herself, to regard it as a subject for ingenious paradoxes and quips of logic. She retired to an inner sanctum of the Temple of Social Usage, where she could hold converse with High Priests, or at least with acolytes—with some one at least who could speak from its inner shrine with authority. I have noticed since those days that the highest priests of the Unholy Trinity—the World, the Flesh, and the Devil—are very hard to get at; the attainable votaries of the first always alleging the existence of a higher rank still, mysteries in impenetrable clouds described as the very best circles; while those of the second and third are able to point to depths of iniquity compared to which their own haunts of vicious dissipation are mere Arcadian solitudes. As for their Pope, the Vicar of Satan on earth, no one has ever seen him. Therefore, it was that my father said to me more than once, in this connection:—"Yes, Master Jackey, your stepmamma and Mrs. Walkinshaw must square it up with Society. Society isn't my line."

It struck me that Mrs. Walkinshaw, considered as a moral balustrade, was scarcely a safe one to rely upon. For when Jemima appealed to her to support her views, and save me from social degeneracy, she exclaimed:—"My dear, I'm *sure* you're right! I'm *certain* you're right! All you say is exactly what my aunt Apollonia would have said. She was a Paletot, you know, and became the third Lady Wheelbarrow. *And* the Authority she was on points of this sort! *Everything* was referred to her—absolutely everything!" The good lady became, as it were, rapt in ecstacy over the multitude of things that had been decided by the late Lady Wheelbarrow, whose names, Christian, maiden, and married, I have got wrong, the ones I give being those most palatable to my memory. Her niece spoiled her implied encomium of my stepmother by ending suddenly:—"But don't ask *my* opinion. In all worldly matters I am worse than useless—a child."

I heard Jemima say:—"How?" and, looking up from a book I was not absorbed in, I saw that she seemed really puzzled. I find I recall moments at about this time of my life when I begin to recognize the good looks of my stepmother. This was one of them.

Mrs. Walkinshaw closed her eyes to picture to herself her ante-

cedent past. "It has been so with me from childhood," said she. "As a mere girl I flung worldly Considerations to the winds. Pretence has always been useless, so I never pretend. Art, Music, Poetry are my idols. I may be wrong." A defiant humility threw down a challenge to the Universe.

My stepmother let it lie on the ground, merely saying:—"No—I'm sure you are right, looking at it from that point of view." Which seemed to me altogether without meaning, Mrs. Walkinshaw's point of view not having been reached. But the intention of it was merely to extinguish the good lady, as she seemed to be declaring off the social tenets her friend had been seeking her support for. She was not the sort to take extinction lying down, and enlarged upon the topic impressively. "If—you knew. If—you—knew!" She repeated the phrase oftener than was necessary, landing at last on its *raison-d'être*:—"If you knew how I have been preached at by my aunts and sisters—yes!—and daughters, all of them disciples of my Aunt Apollonia——!"

"If I knew? . . . I should . . . ?" *Jemima* threw out suggestions for the completion of Mrs. Walkinshaw's sentence, that lady having come to a dead stop apparently for no better purpose than to nod her head with her eyes shut, like a Chinese mandarin.

She responded, rather tartly:—"You would wonder I had survived to have any convictions at all. But it has always been a peculiarity of mine, to be *true to myself*. Others may be slaves of Mammon and Cræsus, and all that sort of thing. I do not quarrel with them—they must go their way, including my Aunt Apollonia, and I must go mine. Now, my dear Mrs. Pascoe"—she left them to go their way unchecked, and became cosy and confidential—"I will tell you exactly what I feel about this dear boy." She dropped her voice till I had to listen hard to hear anything, so I may be wrong in supposing that she said that I had *Genius* written in every pore. My mind assigns those words to her, and Memory accepts them in silence. Other fragments came to me disjointedly, to the effect that the precepts of Aunt Apollonia should be allowed to lie dormant until at least the decision of the great Gromp had been sought for as to the trustworthiness of these inscriptions. I gathered also that Mrs. Walkinshaw had a strong inner conviction—not unconnected with Inspiration—that the decision would be favourable.

Therefore, Gromp remained, as a Rhadamanthus of the near future, until I should complete at Slocum's, my inoculator with the germs of Academic Art, a drawing from the Antique—a solemn thought in itself—worthy to be formally submitted to Gromp,

to enable him to settle whether its author was, or was not, qualified by nature for the career of a real artist, with a studio and lay figures and things, like himself. I have often thought that the conspiracy to elicit from Gromp an opinion on which would turn the career of a young man, with a disposition to hold him responsible for any disaster which that young man might encounter in consequence, was a little unfair on Gromp. However, I suspect that that gentleman had been the victim of many similar conspiracies, and had decided on superhuman caution in every such case made and provided.

I contrived to get inducted into the real School of Art, where I was to have Training, some months before the expiration of the term of Collegiate life I had pledged myself to. I believe I achieved this by showing distinctly that I had no intention of doing any more work in the classes or out of them. My father had some acquaintance with one of the classical professors, and this gentleman felt it his duty to forward to him a portrait of himself which he had caught me executing in class-time, and confiscated. His letter to my father said:—"I have no objection to being represented as the Tragic Muse, but I think even the Tragic Muse, if she had caught one of her pupils wasting his own time and his father's money, would (especially if she had been at Cambridge with his father) have thought it her duty to communicate with headquarters. Don't blow your boy up much—he is very young."

My father did not blow me up, but he did what was more effective. After producing the Tragic Muse and asking if that was what I supposed I was at College for, he told me that he had made up his mind not to enter me for another session. I might go to Slocum's, or whatever his name was, and see what sort of a hash I should make of the Antique, which he understood to mean plaster casts. I was just thinking how glad I was he took it so easily, and what a fortunate youngster I was to have so lenient a parent, when he added, sadly:—"I sometimes feel almost glad, my boy, that your mamma is not here any longer. There—go away and draw things!" I went away, but I had no heart to draw things.

I felt inclined to throw all my Artist's Materials into the dirty dust-bin, and go back and beg and pray my father to allow me at least to carry out the scheme he had first planned for me. But my dear little sister, my Evil Genius unawares, was at hand to neutralize my wiser instincts, and poison my mind with a creed she firmly believed, that the right course for me would be

to throw my whole soul into Training, and the Antique, and prove the wisdom of forsaking the Greek Tragedians and the Binomial Theorem—I remember both, thenabouts—for something in which I felt a keener interest. Gracey cried over me in my dejection in earnest, and, of course, made me perceive that the road I wished to tread was also the one I was morally bound to take, especially in my father's interest. It was wonderful how keenly alive I became to my father's interest when Gracey, in perfect good faith, pointed this out.

So, next spring saw me a real Art-Student, drawing a Globe from nature. I suppose, however, that "nature" is a misnomer, as the *Sphaera Mundi*, has all the nature to itself; at least, if, in the country where they make the Definitions, the Authorities can shut their eyes to a slight flattening at the poles. Also a misnomer in respect of the absence from the surface of my Globe of all those beautiful lines there are in real nature, ecliptics and equators, and so forth, and signs of the zodiac that make one's mouth water, especially Scorpio. While as for finding the longitude on *my* Globe. . . . Well—you know what a job it is on the original! And this Globe I drew was all over like the interior of Africa when I was a boy. I am told that Companies are developing it now.

I wish that I had put into anything I have ever done in life one-half the earnestness and zeal I spent on making that Globe round and solid. I believe that in doing so I was indebted to the fact that there is absolutely nothing in the whole world so easy as to draw a Globe. First one outlines a full moon, then draws a crescent moon into the outline just opposite where the light reflects, or would reflect if shiny. You can see this by looking at nature. Then you hatch black lines—at least, we did at Slocum's—all over the crescent moon. And then comes a delightful surprise. When you fill' up the hatching, so that the lines disappear, you perceive with joy that a perfectly even rich, velvety black is appearing on your handmade paper, and this makes you foresee a great career for yourself, with decorations and ateliers. Then you tone it up, like anybody will show you that's done it before, and he'll give you a start with the pedestal; only you'll have to go by nature, for that. On the propriety of drawing chips out on the pedestal, where they came in nature, opinions were divided. Some held with doing it, because it was rather a lark, others considered it meretricious. The dispositions of the former were sensuous—of the latter severe. I attached myself to the former school, but felt humiliated when Slocum himself said he

saw no harm in doing it if I liked, only it was so easy to do he couldn't see the fun of it. I believe I should have taken these appeals to the gallery out, only the size was ready, not the dimensions—those were intrinsic—but the hot size for fixing, which mustn't be let get cold; and once you size a drawing, there's no getting anything out.

The worst of it was that when I proudly carried home my Globe and exhibited it to my family, these chips and blemishes on the pedestal were at once accepted by them as proof that I was Praxiteles, Titian, Raphael, Michelangelo—any one of the great ones of old whose name sounded well to say—or, at least, that I was all Mrs. Walkinshaw's fancy painted me. I vainly attempted to call attention to the nobler qualities of the drawing. Those abominable fractures asserted themselves noisily, and would not be silenced.

My father said:—"H'm, well! That's all very fine. Now, is this to get you into the Academy? Is it to be shown to Gromp, R. A.?" I repudiated the idea, forcibly. "Well!" my father continued, "I suppose it's all right as far as it goes. Anyhow, those bits chipped out of the stand are first-rate. Look quite the real thing!" And he looked through his hand at them, to increase the illusion.

Gracey said:—"Oh, you darling, *good* Jackey, did you really do that in a fortnight? I should have thought it would have taken weeks. It looks just as if you could touch it." She drew her finger over the bits of realism I had hoped she would not notice. "I really thought it would feel. Oh, how clever of you! Nelsie, do come and see this lovely drawing Jackey has brought home."

Nelsie—that is Ellen—being summoned, came. "Oh dear!" she said, weakly, "can't you ask somebody else to look at it, that knows? Yes, it's very good. I'm sure it's very good, by the look. I've got to see about letting out those gathers, and nobody is any help or gives the slightest advice. Yes, it's very good. . . . What are those?" She had been on the point of departing on the millinery errand, whatever it was, when her eye was caught by those pestilent corrugations, and she quite brightened up under their influence, touching them with her finger, as Gracey had done. "Why—it's quite smooth. How clever!" I had nearly written that this was the only time I ever knew Ellen to show an interest in anything. I refrained because it was only almost true, not quite.

Gracey triumphantly carried the drawing away to show to Varnish, who was mending something in the reserve. I have



scarcely a recollection of Varnish *not* mending something, or not having just mended something, or not being about to mend something. How anything remained unmended in those days—if it ever did!—is more than I can imagine. This time, Varnish laid aside a woolen undervest, making its heart sick with deferred hopes of a button, in order to look at my drawing.

"Well—my word, now!" said she, holding it as far off as possible. "I do declare it's *that* round, and *that* smooth, it does do one's 'art good, only to see it. And my gracious me, if Master Eustace hasn't actly done where a bit's been broke out, just for all the world like real!"

I had cherished a dim hope that the smoothness and roundness would absorb Varnish's attention, and even now I fondly fancied I might head it back to them. "They were awfully easy to do," I said. "I only did them because they were there."

"Silly Jackey!" said Gracey. "As if you could have had a better reason! Mr. Ruskin says so." Since those days, the name of Ruskin, at that date I think still an object of literary ferocity to standard Art critics, has been successively that of an Apostle whose sayings it was blasphemy to contradict, of a fogey in a niche in the Temple of Orthodoxy, and of a successful candidate for a more commodious one in that of Oblivion.

"Slocum says Mr. Ruskin's an ass," said I, briefly. And the subject dropped. Gracey said she should buy a frame and glass for my Globe, and it should hang in Varnish's room—the reserve. Varnish treated the prospect of this as a lot quite beyond human deserts.

I believe after this I "did" a foot at Slocum's, and then a hand; only I think the hand's wall-hook came out and let it down on the ground, smashing it and stopping my appreciation of its knuckles. In consequence of this mishap, I rose prematurely to the level of the Young Antinous, who was accounted easy, having no arms or legs. Strictly speaking, I ought to have tackled Jupiter Olympus, who is only a head; but then his magnificent coiffure defies the draughtsman, unless he 'umbugs it. This expression I borrow from a fellow-student to whom I am also indebted for one or two phrases which I fancy have crept into this text. He told me his name without its initial, and I was led to believe that I should be safe in omitting it, as I presumed he knew. So I was puzzled when he said:—"You're pokin' your fun at me, calling me Hopkins!" I came in time to understand that a definite effort on his part to omit an aspirate always led to the production of one rather like a gunshot. Thus in describing to me his grandfather, who had

written a treatise, he stated that he was known—to some Theological world I presume—as Horthodox 'Opkins. He had a maternal aunt who was born without legs, but could make elder wine. I am giving his words as I remember them. He was pursoooin' the Fine Arts on his own 'ook, because his family disapproved of them.

I became acquainted with him because he lent me his plumb-bob, mine having vanished through a curly hole in the box I sat upon, through losing touch with its string. He informed me that I might shake that box till my 'art broke, without getting of it—the plump-bob—out; whereas if I had a little patience, and giv' up thinkin' about it, it would come out easy, of its own accord. Which proved to be the case in the end, though I should have wished it might have happened sooner, as the Young Antinous was entirely fostered on my neighbour's plumb-bob, and he and I always wanted it at the same time. Hopkins told me further concerning plumb-bobs and their inherent vices, that they always *did* get inside of your box, do what you would, and that you had to look uncommon sharp to see that no one else got 'old of them when they emerged again into the light of Heaven. It appeared that these boxes resembled hens; and were, like them, prone to lay in unexpected places, but without the pæans of triumph that announce the advent of an egg to the Universe. So you had to look uncommon sharp!

If any one unaccustomed to art-culture as it existed in the fifties were to read this, he might ask what the plumb-bobs were for. I should reply, if I were within hearing, that they were to assist the artistic eye in its determination of what was underneath what. My recollection of the "Antique School" at Slocum's is as of a room full of aspirants, suspending plumb-bobs between their eyesight and the model they were drawing, to determine the position of points above or below others. They might, but for the absence of rods, have been fishermen, looked at from the point of view of those who, like myself, regard the careful watching of a line suspended in water, without result, as fishing. A shrewder effort of memory brings back sporadic examples of what we called measurement; to wit, the checking of proportionate lengths on a porte-crayon held at any convenient distance. The variation in this distance always struck me as fatal to accuracy. It was, however, regarded as Training, at my school, in the fifties.

There was so much flat shadderin'-up in the Young Antinous—so said Mr. Hopkins—that he "took" six weeks. What could you expect when the largest possible surface had to be "gone over" with the smallest possible point. That sounds like Political

Economy, but it isn't. Six irredeemable weeks of my life did I spend, filling up any little white spots I could detect in the rich black velvet surface of that shadow, I think my pertinacity may have had a good moral effect, as no doubt was the case with Sisyphus; though indeed my surroundings may have been more trying than his; and, therefore, more chastening. As nearly as I can remember, the landscape in Tartarus which supplied the background to the son of Æolus was desolate, whereas I was surrounded—I need not scruple to write it now, fifty-odd years later—by a ribald crew. Every profession has its offscourings, and Art Schools have, or had in those days, an extraordinary power of collecting and detaining the scum and detritus of—suppose we say—Artists' Colourmens' Customers! We can hardly say Artists. I have asked my Self whether I am bound to write a word about xxxxx or xxxx or xxxxxx, and the answer comes back that I may do as I like. I am not sure—I might like a word or two about them. I will, as Varnish used to say, "leave them be" for a while, and get on with personal memories.

Apollo Sauroctonos followed the Young Antinous, and then I girded up my loins for a dash at the gates of the Academy Schools. Laocoon absorbed the whole of my energies for six weeks, as well as six shillings-worth of Italian chalk, and the undivided attention of my own plumb-bob, which had risen from the tomb, and been provided with a new string. I suppose my drawing was a creditable one, or it would not have landed me in the R. A. schools, as it afterwards did. But if it was, I contend that my admission proved nothing but that a youth below the average capacity for drawing can convince inattention that he is above it, if he is allowed indefinite time, Italian chalk *ad libitum*, and a plumb-bob all to himself.

My own belief is that that plumb-bob was my Evil Genius, and that my Good Genius shoved it inside of that box, hoping—weakly, I must confess—to head off a beloved *protégé* from a labyrinth bristling with disasters at every turn. How that plumb-bob must have chuckled when it got its narrow end through the zigzag hole again, and how pleased and vertical it must have felt with its new string! A droring with all the perpendic'lars took wrong could never—said Mr. Hopkins, whose phraseology hangs about me,—meet with approval from The Experienced Eye, and I feel he was right.

Before, however, this drawing was submitted to the Experienced Eye, it had to be shown, with other evidences of ability, to Mrs. Walkinshaw's Gromp; no one else's appearing on the horizon.

Gromp dwelt in Park Village East, and had done so since the romantic mind of its founder carried out the idea of fringing the Regents Canal with bowers and cots and chalets. When we were admitted to his Studio—my soul felt hushed with awe at being inside a real Studio!—it was borne in upon us that the windows had not been open since that date. Nevertheless, respiration appeared possible in practice, suggesting that Gromp smoked a mixture which yielded oxygen. A damp flavour of a canal may have been imagination stimulated by knowledge of the proximity of one, or it may not. But the gloom was real, due to a square yard of a window a mile square, or thereabouts, admitting light enough to make it visible. And the Chaos was real; the unaccommodating properties sprawling over one another without the slightest regard for Chronology; Henrietta Maria's frock crushed by a suit of armour; the rest of the suit riding a wooden horse with its nose chipped off; a murdered woman in a sack, or what seemed one, till the spectator detected square steel heads ingrafted in her joints—the sort whose winch is never to be found when wanted—and thereby knew her for a lay figure. And folios on chairs—the sort that wants the title-pages or the colophons—whose backs had to be held on when referred to. Which, however, one felt instinctively, never happened nowadays, and might never happen till they were catalogued for auction, and picked up for an old song by their next neglecter. Then would a spasmodic attempt be made to prove them of value, followed by the collapse of baffled sharpers.

I suppose what brings Gromp's mouldy folios to my mind is that when my father and I were shown into the presence of their owner, he, after giving my father three fingers to shake, and myself one, enjoined a pause with a deprecating hand, to the end that seats should be provided for his company. "Stop a bit!" said he. "Don't you touch—because of the dust." He decanted a cat off a stack of books on a chair, and removed them cautiously onto a neighbouring throne, which I recognized as such because we had one at Slocum's. He was making some show—with his pocket-handkerchief I think—of beautifying the seat of this chair for service, when an attempt of the cat to go to bed again on the top book caused it to slide off, and fall with a dust-producing thump on the floor. The painter threw up his hands in despair as a visible cloud rose and floated into a ray of light that came through some chink or keyhole, while my father melted away into contrition for the disturbance we were creating.

"Wouldn't matter if it wasn't for the dust!" said Gromp.

"Some Studios they try sweeping up, but we let it lie, here. No fault of yours, you know—only the cat! She's accustomed to sleep on a book, and prefers Poliphilus. We'll come in the middle before the picture, if you've no objection. My housekeeper wipes over a place on the floor in the middle—like an island. . . . There!—we shall do now."

My father had the cat's chair, on the island, and the painter read through Mrs. Walkinshaw's letter of introduction twice; once apparently to get to the signature and find out who wrote it, a second time to master its contents. This done he said:—"I thought her husband had a *g* in his name. Walkingshaw. I suppose she knows. . . . Is this the boy?" He broke off to lay a hand on my shoulder, as if there were several other boys in the room; then went back to the letter. "Yes—she was Miss Brabazon when I knew her—Adelaide Brabazon. None of your Mrs. Walkingshaws! I suppose she's changed—eh? . . . Well, she must be . . . Eh—what—how long ago?" For my father had manifestly begun to frame an obvious question. The old man—I believe he was over eighty—began thinking of dates:—"Ninety-eight—ninety-nine. . . . Yes—it was ninety-nine when I painted my Herodias. There she hangs in the dark corner there—you can't see her, so it's no use looking. Four, five, yes—it must have been six years after that I saw Miss Brabazon. Saw her at odd times for some years after that! Then she married. Seen nothing of her since! . . . She wants me to look at your boy's drawings and say what I think. That's the compact. He's got 'em in a roll there, I see. Fetch 'em out!"

I did so, and flattened them out for inspection, but it took minutes to do. My father's voice, talking to the R. A. mixes in my memory with the obduracy of cartridge paper that has been rolled up to the diameter of a gunbarrel. It says to that veteran:—"I'm quite in earnest, Mr. Gromp. I shall be just as grateful for a decisive condemnation of my boy's drawings as for any approval. What I want is to have the question settled for me by those who know. I know I can rely on a conscientious verdict, from you."

"I'm not so sure, myself. But I'll see what I can do for you, in the way of conscientiousness. Just this once! Because, you see, I've no interest in telling any fibs. However, if I can't give a verdict it will be conscientious to say so—won't it now?"

"I hope," said my father, "it's a plain case, one way or the other. Thank you!" I looked up to see why he was thanking, and found that the old gentleman had offered him a pinch of snuff. He accepted it, and I felt it ratified a treaty that might be



fatal to my aspirations. Mr. Gromp tapped the snuff-box and said, "Petitot," and I don't think my father understood. It drew them nearer together, however, for its owner began talking confidentially. "Mrs. Walkingshaw, or I should say Walkinshaw. Yes. I haven't really seen her since she was a stylish young lady of twenty. Saw her rather frequently *then*. Gave her drawing lessons. I was—I was—by way of being a poor artist, in those days. And when she married, I lost sight of her. Naturally!"

"Naturally!" said my father, and I didn't see why.

"She wrote a line to say expect you. Where did I put it? . . . Oh, I know—it's in this drawer. Yes, I knew the hand. The hand hasn't changed much. . . . But you say *she* has changed a great deal?"

"I didn't say so," said my father. "Because how can I know? But I think you may take it as the case. Why—her daughter has a son nearly grown up!"

The old man stood silent for a space, seeming to ratify or reject some passing recollection. Then he said thoughtfully, half to himself:—"Yes. She didn't look much like a grown-up grandson, thenadays!" And to me:—"Well—let's see the drawings."

I have tried to recall all I could of this passing talk of old Gromp, partly because it seems to me to have a bearing on the strange way in which one may go on living in the dark about one's fellow-creatures, with light near at hand for whoso chooses sight; partly because it was the cause of much restless speculation afterwards as to which was telling lies about a matter-of-fact, he or Mrs. Walkinshaw. I have my own opinion now, but at that time this lady was above ground, and I have always felt that it was one of the most difficult things in the world to face a real liar, and denounce him to Heaven and Earth. I could not reconcile my mind to the existence of so much mendacity, while its perpetrator was actual and visible.

We saw the drawings. I spread them over the dustless island before the eyes of my Rhadamanthus, and every moment felt smaller and smaller as he looked at, and said nothing about, each successive sample. Hope stirred feebly in my mind as he went back to my early Prometheus, and dwelt upon it considerably. I am convinced now that this was merely his tribute to Quality, backed by the charm which careful reconstruction confers on a disintegrated sample of incompetence. Ask the Italian artist whose great abilities supply a steady current of *Antichità* to the shops of Florence and Rome, how he attains to his greatest successes. He will tell you that he throws his whole soul into the production

of a Lippi, a Ghirlandaio, or it may be a Cassone by a *pictor ignotus*, so that the purchaser may start fair and ascribe it to everybody; and that then when his work is perfect he honestly spoils it, and has it carelessly restored by a Vandal. This is why Time has always spared—so fortunately—the best bits of what you have picked up so very cheap, considering. The forger—true Artist to the core—cannot bring himself to be absolutely ruthless to his best work.

This aspect of things influences Royal Academicians as well as mortals, and the undeniable Quality of Prometheus for the moment arrested Gromp. But the appreciation of his position only came to me later. "I have made you a promise, Mr. Pascoe," said he, when inspection time seemed near a natural end. "I have promised to tell you if these drawings of your boy's would warrant you in refusing to give him an Artist's education. Well—they won't. I'll go as far as that."

I saw that my father was adjusting his cheekbones with his fingers, as he used to do when perplexed. "I almost hoped you were going to say they would," said he. "It would have supplied me with a foothold. It seems to me that the point is—will they warrant me in *giving* him an Artist's education?"

Mr. Gromp said "Hm-m-m!" so continuously that I thought he didn't mean to stop. He did, however, and apparently found the words he wanted. For he seemed contented with:—"I don't think I could give a positive negative to that." I felt a slight revival of Hope.

My father said:—"But more no than yes?" And then getting no answer, "Or more yes than no?" rather as a reminder that an answer was expected, than as catechism.

"I couldn't say," said this unsatisfactory Rhadamanthus. "Try it by all means if you like. I should be better able to say in another twelvemonth. Send him to the Academy, if you think it worth it. I couldn't undertake to say more at present." I was just going to tie up my roll when he stopped me and made me undo it again. Where, he asked, was the drawing I had done for admission to the Schools? I produced Laocoon, and unrolled him. Rhadamanthus took a good look all round at him, then said:—"Yes—I thought so! It's a better drawing than one I sent in when I was a boy a month or so younger than this young chap, I should say."

"And that one got you in?" said my father, not unnaturally. I thought I saw daylight, but disappointment was in store for me. For this inconsequent Academician answered:—"Well—no!"

It didn't get me in. I stayed out—wasn't a student at any time."

I think my father began to be alive to the fact that Rhadamanthus was rather a broken reed to lean upon. "We mustn't take up your time any more, Mr. Gromp," said he, "it's very kind of you to give an opinion, and I shall be guided by it." This can only have been civility.

I rolled up Laocoon with the rest, and the visit to the great man came to an end. I think he was one of the most advanced adepts in the Art of Saying Nothing that I ever came across.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE STORY

As time went on Helen's life as Mistress of The Retreat took on a rather monotonous cast. The novelty of her position wore off, and she recognized more plainly the inevitable limitations attendant on her social career. Roberta's marriage was an immense relief to her, she felt safer now that she was out of the house. Ellen with her flabby nature and all-absorbing interest in Church matters was not to be feared, and since her sister had left home she had become quite friendly with her stepmother in a negative sort of way; besides she was sure to marry that parson, he was always dangling after her. Varnish she knew was her secret enemy, but as no uncomfortable developments occurred in that quarter, Helen felt she might consider herself safe.

It was not any of the household that she feared, her husband was amiable and considerate, convinced that he had done the right thing by his family and himself in marrying Helen, and gifted with a most comfortably unobservant nature strongly tinged with optimism. No, as far as he went all was well.

What was it then that was wrong? Why could not Helen Pascoe, secure in her surroundings, and able to indulge at will in all the minor diversions and dissipations of a fairly well-to-do professional household, why could she not be content and still that restless longing for change and excitement that beset her? Change at any price was what she craved for. Something to break the uniform greyness of the life that seemed closing her in on all sides. She longed for the sun to break through the cloud and bring her light and warmth and vitality. But her sun, the centre and mainspring of her being, her sun that hid behind that leaden veil of everyday existence, was dark! It was black! Black as ink! And Helen Pascoe restlessly paced the embankment one chill November evening, in a vain endeavour to escape from the thing that she knew to be herself.

It was getting late, surely it was time to go home now? But still Helen continued her rapid walking to and fro!

Oh, it was that print! she could not forget it! What could have possessed Eustace John, with his newly found enthusiasm for the

fine arts, to bring home such a hideous thing and expect them all to admire it!

"I thought peradventure the darkness might cover me." She had it always before her eyes, that hunted figure hurrying along the deserted road, with the full moon emerging from behind a dark cloud, and lighting up vividly the bloodstained fugitive. Oh, it was horrible, and Helen Pascoe leaned over the parapet and gazed down at the cold dark river beneath her. Peace and rest, could she find them there? The water seemed calling to her! She had only just to climb the parapet and plunge in, and end it all! The struggle of drowning would soon be over, then rest and oblivion for ever! . . .

She glanced hurriedly round, it was nearly seven o'clock and the embankment was deserted. Now was the moment! She must be quick or some one might come!

"Forth John's soul flared into the dark."

What made those lines of Browning's suddenly ring in her ears and unnerve her? Whence came the flash of startled insight that made her hug the warm covering of the flesh that hid her dark soul, and tear back with frantic haste to the shelter of the home she had been on the brink of leaving for ever.

"My love, how late you are," exclaimed Mr. Pascoe as he opened the street-door himself to let her in. "I was getting quite anxious about you."

"Aunt Helen, Cook is afraid the fish will be overboiled," called Gracey, looking over the bannister rail.

"I shan't be a minute getting my things off, I mistook the time," explained Helen, as she ran upstairs.

The dining-room door stood open, and as she passed it she caught sight of the cheerful fire blazing on the hearth, and the table tastefully laid for their evening meal. Oh, she was glad to be back. What an escape she had had! That awful cold dark river! and Helen shuddered. She must forget it all! cast it from her like some frightful dream. Yes, but that grave at Highgate, could she forget that?



## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

I WAS put through my paces at the next meeting of the Club, which had retained its character, in spite of the fact that its members were growing up, better than Institutions of its class usually do. This meeting followed the visit to Gromp, which took place one Sunday morning, on the subsequent Saturday. Cooky always came to dinner on Saturday, risking his soul when the days were long and the dinner-bell rang before sunset.

I cannot fix the time of year at which this happened, to my satisfaction. But Cooky's soul must have been safe, for though he came early to allow of the Club meeting, the waning light made it hard to see some features of my Laocoon, which was adduced in evidence, or illustration, of the only point in my favour that could be extracted from the indecision of Rhadamanthus.

"So he said the details were better, little Buttons—was that his game?" Thus Cooky, looking at Laocoon, with Gracey looking over his shoulder.

"No, he didn't. He said the deetails were better. In Art, they're deetails."

"Well, it isn't much to go by, but it's something. You've done *something* better than a Royal Academician, little Buttons!" I felt set up. "But did he say he was older or younger?"

I had to climb down. "He said he was younger—a lot!"

"Oh, blow!" said Cooky. "What a chap he is for taking his own edge off! First of all your Governor asks him if these drawings would warrant his giving you an Artist's education, and he says he can't give a positive negative. Then your Governor asks if they would warrant him in refusing it, and he says he won't go as far as that. Then he says he sent in a *worse* drawing than this to the Academy when he was younger than you, and didn't get in! *He's* no good, little Buttons!"

"But, Monty," said the female member of the Club, ruefully. "He did say he wouldn't go as far as that."

"As far as what?"

"As far as—what you said just now. And he did say he couldn't

give a positive negative to . . . to the other way round. I think if you add those two up, it makes a great deal."

In the Club, we were never pedantic. Cooky accepted Gracey's speech as intelligible, because its meaning was clear—not a bad reason. "Your sister thinks you've got a verdict, Buttons," said he.

"Well—hasn't he, Monty?"

"If you think so, Gracey, I'll stick up for you."

"But don't you agree that I'm right?"

"I don't care whether you are or not. I'm on your side."

"But I do care whether you don't care whether I am or not. No—*do* say what you really think!" Gracey spoke coaxingly, and knew that Cooky's reply would come from his inner soul.

It came. "All right, Gracey!" said he. "I won't make any compliments. But I shall stick up for your side, on principle, when I'm asked." He then gave what seems to me now a perfectly reasonable view on the merits of my case. He had no faith in my Art, that was clear. But he knew nothing about Art—that was not so clear. The judgment of Rhadamanthus he condemned as too indecisive and ambiguous to have any working value. But he, Cooky Moss, was prepared to put aside conscience and veracity, and espouse any faith soever, on any subject, to meet the views of the lady-member of the Club.

Gracey did not seem to have any scruples about accepting chivalrous service on the terms stated. "Now mind you do!" was her injunction to Monty when he finished up with:—"I shall say so to your Governor if he asks me."

I wish now that the deliberations of the Club had had a more vitally judicial character. I see now that its decisions were those of Love, not Judgment; of Gracey's love for her brother and his friend's love for her. I suppose that, in a sense, I knew of the existence of the latter, but a fatal immaturity clouded my mind, and I took everything as a matter-of-course without thought of the future. I believe that if any one had then raised discussion about the nature of these two young people's sentiments, I should have contributed to it the valuable view that it wasn't Lover's Rot, but that they really were awfully fond of one another, and no humbug. Why I should take this drastic view of the tender passion I have no idea. I have to accept facts as they stand.

My Governor did ask for Cooky's views on the subject, that evening. A kind of symposium on the merits of the case ensued. For not only was the whole family there, my sister Roberta having driven her husband over from Petersham, but Mrs. Walkinshaw

had also graced our board, with two distinct purposes; one to hear what Gromp thought, the other to meet again that charming Roberta, her Joan of Arc, and her delightfully intelligent husband. It seemed to me that she took up a position about this couple, that she had been present at the first development of their early love, and had watched its growth and fostered it. It seemed to me also that Joan of Arc's delightfully intelligent husband had on some previous occasion incurred the displeasure of Joan by acceding too readily to Mrs. Walkinshaw's assumption. For I distinctly heard Roberta say to him:—"If you are going to lie down this time and allow that woman to fizzle over us, do! But *I* won't stand it. Joan of Arc, indeed!" To which he answered, weakly:—"What's a feller to do against a woman like that, Ro?" And she replied tartly:—"Very well, go your own way. Now you know!" I fancy also that she said:—"I'll Joan of Arc her, if she tries it on me!" When the excellent lady, shortly after, swam into the room with outstretched arms, as though to enfold Society in her embrace, if its sex permitted it, and exclaimed:—"Well—this is delightful!" I fully expected to see her Joan of Arked—I have to write it that way—somehow or other. Perhaps she was. All I noticed was that she failed to get home on Roberta, who used her right cleverly, with the expression on her face that one ascribes to Polly Hopkins, when Mr. Tomkins called on her. An attempt at pleasantries fell through, Mrs. Walkinshaw having expanded into *empressement*, voluminously, and opened her eyes as far as they would go, to say:—"We—are—the Graysons! Think of that!" But she had given herself away. For my sister said briefly, "I beg your pardon," and awaited an explanation, which was not so easy to formulate at a short notice. It is of course possible that this was Joan of Arking, or akin to it.

I certainly thought Roberta victorious on points, in these preliminary rounds. Mrs. Walkinshaw kept away, avoiding clutches, and showing some clever tactics. She escaped the explanation, just referred to, by rushing into my stepmother, and absorbing her apologies, for being late into her outskirts. She always seemed, when in evening warpaint, to teem with clouds of a gauzy nature, and to be saturated with eau-de-Cologne. I knew what Jemima was saying to her, on a sofa afar to which she had been successfully carried off for confidences, while we awaited my father's appearance: dinner was always announced first. She was saying she could not but rejoice, for the dear boy's sake—videlicet mine—that Mr. Gromp, who seemed a charming old gentleman, had been able to speak so positively as to my unfitness for an Artist's career.

She was dwelling on the social advantages I might have sacrificed by adopting it. But she feared it would be a bitter disappointment for the dear boy. I must have heard something to this effect to carry into the dining-room an impression I distinctly remember, that Gromp had written to my father, unknown to me, a supplementary judgment on my work, condemning it.

It was, however, merely an innocent attempt on Jemima's part to get a flavour of prejudgment of the case into the moral atmosphere. If she had succeeded, it may be I should have been headed off from the pursuit of Art, and become, somehow, a useful member of Society.

It was late in the evening when the Symposium came about. My father came in after his pipe, accompanied by my brother-in-law, Anderson, and Mr. Stowe, the auctioneer, our other guest. They had gone into the library to smoke, while Cooky and I slipped away to a late club-meeting. I suppose I had been under consideration in the library because my father said:—"Here *are* the drawings—some of them"—on entering the drawing-room, much as though he were carrying on a previous conversation. The drawings had been produced to be shown to Mrs. Walkinshaw, amid shrieks of congratulation to their author on that lady's part.

"Just come and take a look at them, Scritchey," said my father, addressing Mr. Stowe. "You're an Art Auctioneer, and ought to know something about Art."

"I don't," said Mr. Stowe. They sat together at one end of the room. I was halfway between them and Mrs. Walkinshaw, beside my stepmother on the sofa, at the other. So I heard both.

"Now, we shall hear!" gave out Mrs. Walkinshaw. "Dear Mrs. Pascoe, where did you get your Mr.——"

"His name's Stowe," said Jemima, impassively. Mr. Stowe was not a favourite with her—she thought him not *quite*. "What about him?"

"He seems to me my *beau ideal* of . . . of the Art Thinker——"

I fancy Jemima saw the necessity of stopping this. "He's Stacpoole's, you know—that's all!" said she, so low that I barely caught the words.

Mrs. Walkinshaw's voice changed. "Oh-h, ye'es! *Stacpoole's* . . . let . . . me . . . see—*Stacpoole's*." She spoke as if she was puzzled by the first syllable, and would rather he should have been *Welshpool's* or *Hartlepool's*.

"Yes—auction people—Old Masters—articles of vertu . . . that

sort of thing!" Jemima spoke as one who said—come down far enough and you shall see.

Mrs. Walkinshaw dried up very much, but felt about for palliatives. "Oh, but old Masters! Dear Mrs. Pascoe, the sums spoken of are frequently *fabulous*! Those who handle them must have *some* knowledge of Art."

Jemima detached herself from auctioneers, saying as she got away to the horizon:—"Very likely. We shall see."

However fabulous were the sums that Stacpoole's handled, one of the partners of that firm continued to profess ignorance of the Fine Arts. I inferred this from overhearing my father's words to him at this moment, as he raised his voice to say:—"It doesn't matter how little you know about Art yourself, Scritchey. That's not the point. What I want to know is, if it were your boy, not mine, what should you do?"

Mr. Stowe seemed very uncertain. Indeed, he was apparently trying for a way out. "Which of 'em do you mean?" said he. "I've got such a lot."

"Any one. One about the same age."

"Well—you see—having such a lot, I'm only too glad to let 'em have their own way. I don't believe there are eight professions—are there?" Some reckoning ended in the conclusion that there might be, if you counted the Church. "I couldn't stand that, you know," said Mr. Stowe. "He'd want to read prayers, and I should want him to behave like a reasonable Christian. . . . Well, you know perfectly well what I mean, Strap!"

"I know. Only it doesn't arise from the question on the paper. Keep to the point. If one of your boys thought he could do Art, would you let him?"

"Let him be an Artist? Why—certainly!—if he showed ability. If people bought his pictures, why shouldn't he make his living that way?"

"That brings us to the point. Do you see any reason, from these drawings, to suppose that any one will ever want to buy my boy's pictures?"

"That can only be settled by trying the experiment. Teach him to paint pictures and see if any one buys them. He can be taught in three or four years, if he's tractable. I fancy—but I tell you I don't know—that there's nothing in these drawings to show that he won't be able to paint pictures. Rather t'other way, I should say. When they are painted, we shall soon see if any one wants them."

"I am completely puzzled," said my father. And, indeed, he



looked so. "Do you mean to say Scritchey," he continued after a moment, "that there is no such thing as an absolutely good or bad picture—that it is entirely a matter of fashion?"

"Selling is entirely a matter of fashion. Pictures are good pictures that sell. Bad pictures are pictures that don't. There may be people that know good pictures from bad, but all I can say is they keep outside auction-rooms."

"Then Master Jackey may still have a chance, however badly he paints?"

"Rather. You come to the Mart some day when a big sale's on, and see if what I say isn't true."

"But I shan't know good from bad myself."

"Oh dear, yes you will! Everybody does."

"Doesn't that contradict what you said before?"

"Of course it does, flatly. But what I said before didn't mean that nobody knew good from bad, but that nobody could prove anything either way. Everybody knows, but then, unless he praises what other people think rubbish, nobody will credit him with a higher form of knowledge than his own, and that's the sort of fame bounce grows fat upon. Believe me, dear Strap, that there is a factor in Art of more importance than correct drawing or dignified composition, or striking chiaroscuro or vigorous impasto, and that is——" Mr. Stowe dropped his voice to a whisper on his last word, "Humbug!" I knew what the word was, though I didn't hear the whole of it.

I have asked my Self how much of the above conversation I really recollect, and the reply has been—almost none! How then, is it that I am so firmly convinced that the conversation, or something very near it, took place? I can't account for my conviction; but having it, I can resubstantiate its spirit to my own satisfaction, which is the only one I am bound to consider. One thing is in my Memory's favour—that she resents admission to her report of what I know belongs to a later date. As for instance, her repetition to me of Mr. Stowe's enumeration of the bull's-eye, so to speak, in Art's targets, which belonged to its time, an age anterior to "Values," and still more so to Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, and Futurism. The late fifties were still under the spell of Pastism, and my own feeling is—but I mention it with diffidence—that they were kept steady by it. I must, however, resist the temptations of a fascinating subject, the Correlation of Art and Imposture, and get back to The Retreat, in what must have been the spring of a very late fifty.

The remaining incidents of that evening, that tempt Memory

to turn them over with her spade, on the chance of a find, flicker to and fro in her phantasmagoria, as she presents them to me, at random. My sister Roberta yawns behind her hand, frequently; latterly like a gulf or chasm at one's feet, in Poetry. She sits at the round table in the middle of the room with the big oil lamp on it, looking at the last *Punch*. She is waiting out the evening and wants to get home. Why she need keep so savage with Jemima is a thing that puzzles me. Ellen has forgiven, superficially at least. Varnish certainly has not, but then—I don't believe my dear old nurse ever did forgive the Sly Cat. Every one has some fault, and I suppose this was Varnish's. As my mind goes back to the image of Roberta that evening, it sees those dark, handsome eyes of hers fluctuate between *Punch* and my stepmother, still devoting herself to Mrs. Walkinshaw, as the guest *par excellence*. I speculate a little, idly, on how Bert can know when Jemima is looking at her, so as always to avoid meeting her eyes. She does know, somehow, and becomes absorbed in *Punch* at any critical moment. Her husband is one of a talkative group, at the piano. He appears to be enjoying his visit, and is in possession of the rostrum, or music-school. He can sing nigger songs, but his choice of one rouses his wife to protest. She is sick and tired of that dreary "Old Folks at Home," and it is suppressed. I had a sneaking liking for that family and was sorry.

This is all fifty-five years ago. The last time I set foot out of doors I heard a small boy singing that air, and it brought back my early days to me, as nothing can but a song—except, indeed, a smell, which beats all other resurrections hollow. I thought to myself that he must needs be the composer's grandson. But no! For, an hour after, in another place, behold a totally different small boy, addressing an imaginary audience of Darkeys, and longing for the Suwannee River. The song had come to life again, after half a century of oblivion, and I was still here—still here!—to hear it.

The memory of Anderson Grayper's suppression by his wife when he played a few chords of the air, and stopped for instructions what else he should sing, is stronger in my mind now than that of those small Chelsea interpreters of it, whose parents I suppose were then unborn. I suspect that the mind of old age, thrown back on itself, revives all the first clean press-work of experience, struck off before the sheets were soiled. The recalling of this incident makes me recollect that he sang an alternative, a song about rhinoceroses, curious beasts who got themselves all

over mud and revelled in morasses. The sublime condescension of Mrs. Walkinshaw towards these trivial and puerile diversions was a sight to be seen and remembered.

I wish some such suggestive power would work towards the explanation of an incident that happened an hour later, after Mrs. Walkinshaw's carriage had borne her away to Ladbroke Square, Bayswater. It arose from my father saying to Cooky:—"I haven't heard you yet, Nebuchadnezzar, on the subject of the drawings. Come along into the library, and let's hear it. Come along, boys! Come along, Anderson!" I knew he threw my brother-in-law in, that he might not feel out in the cold. The effect was that—as Mr. Stowe had departed some time since—my two elder sisters and our stepmother were left alone in the drawing-room. For Gracey took leave to follow us, and no one said her nay. Bert called out impatiently after her husband:—"Don't be long, Dan. Remember it's more than an hour's drive!" Dan—obviously a perversion of his first name—gave rather a grudging assent, and I bore my collection of drawings in, and laid them out favourably for inspection.

I don't think my father was the least aware that the witness whose testimony he was seeking was influenced by a member of the public who had got into the Court. I don't think he knew—indeed, I did not know myself—the extent of that influence, or its possibilities. My father never saw anything. He was aware that it was very nice that Gracey and Nebuchadnezzar were such good friends. But he thought it possible that two reasonable young persons, who knew that Hymen was out of the question, would keep Cupid out of the answer. I was as bad as he. But then I had the excuse of youth and inexperience.

I never knew Cooky to do anything by halves. He had undertaken to misrepresent facts on my behalf, and he kept his promise honourably. Gracey got behind my father's chair to keep her eye on her advocate and encourage him if he wavered; she being, as it were, in the position of the solicitor in charge of the case. But no supervision was necessary. I saw a trace of impatience in the solicitor's blue eye when her counsel opened with a disclaimer of any knowledge of the Fine Arts. But it disappeared when the spurious and insincere character of this aggressive ebullition of modesty became manifest.

My father treated it as it deserved. "Don't know anything about the Fine Arts, don't we?" said he. "What's that got to do with the matter? We should never have any opinions at all, if we waited to know about things before we formed them. Be-

sides, if we know things our opinions get biassed. I want an un-biassed opinion."

Cooky's opinion, which derived great weight from his large dark eyes and massive cheek bones, was sound according to my father's view, in so far as that it was uninfluenced by any knowledge of the subject. But he had been entrusted with a brief by my solicitor and was bound to make the best of the case, having once accepted it. He only knew, he said, that none of the other chaps could do that sort of drawings. Some of them could copy, but that wasn't Art. Mr. Gromp was an awful swell, of course; but the more awful a swell was, the more cautious would be his judgments. Also, it was to be observed that this caution had been shown just as much by a refusal to say that it was quite impossible that I should become famous, as to admit that it was possible that I should. Such scrupulous impartiality cut both ways. And so on. The counsel's solicitor looked very much as if she should employ him in her next case, and said:—"There now, Papa, you see what Monty thinks!"

I suppose it was because my father felt that it would be uncivil to leave his son-in-law out in the cold that he said:—"And what do you think about it, Anderson?" The answer began:—"Roberta thinks . . . ." And went on to give his wife's opinion that I was constitutionally and intellectually unfitted for the practice of painting, and that the lives of Artists were generally disreputable. He did not mention his own opinion. My father said:—"And what do you think yourself?" He, therefore, vacillated as one vacillates who has no views of one's own, and is afraid to advocate any one else's.

He was still engaged in expressing uncertainty when Ellen came in from the drawing-room, and spoke to my father in a disturbed undertone, so that I did not hear her words.

"Oh . . . . Yes! . . . Well! . . . Yes, I'll come!" said he, catching the last words of her communication in the intervals of his reply to her first. "Pick up the drawings and put 'em away, Jackey!" I thought I caught the sound of ruffled speech in the drawing-room in spite of its distance, both doors being then open, but I don't think this was my reason for carrying the drawings back thither to replace them in their portfolio. I should have done that in any case, without incentives of curiosity. As a matter of fact, I cannot remember that I felt any vital interest in what was going on. I was too selfishly absorbed in my own affairs. I heard, "Do they want us?" from Cooky, and, "Perhaps they don't," from Gracey. They remained. My brother-in-law



hesitated out at the door after me, and wavered in the passage.

I entered the drawing-room long enough after my father to lose what he first said. But from my knowledge of him I suspected it of being:—"What's the rumpus?" For his words that followed some incomplete reply to a question were:—"Well—what is?" I made for my portfolio—the one that never had the flat-fish in it—and attended to the stowing away of my drawings. I was conscious that my incoming had checked two answers; one from my sister and one from my stepmother. My perceptiveness went the length of hastening operations, and I got my works interned in the pause which followed. Then I looked round.

My father was still standing near the door, with his eyes fixed on Roberta. As I turned I caught vividly the image of her that is with me still, the flashing anger of her eyes, and the white face I saw on the day of my father's wedding, but this time with the mass of rich black hair too securely coiled to be shaken loose by a *brusquerie* of movement. Her eyes were not fixed on my father, but on Jemima, and I turned to look at *her*. She was on the sofa where she had sat by Mrs. Walkinshaw, with her gaze directed towards her stepdaughter, and a look in her face that was as much astonishment or terror as anger. I recall her image less clearly than my sister's, but then, of course, I saw Jemima so often later. As I picture her now, as seen then, there is a burning red spot on her either cheek, that my mind harmonizes idly with the tint of her pink silk dress. She moves uneasily and gives me the idea that her breath comes quick. Ellen was there, too, crying, I think; but I did not notice her. Further, I was merely aware that there had been hostilities, arrested by my father's entry, and that I was, on the whole not wanted. A glance from him gave me the hint to go, and I departed. I caught a word or two of the recrudescence of the dispute as I closed the door.

Anderson Grayper was in the passage, still wavering. I thought he looked very much concerned, and rather frightened. "Is it a shine?" said he.

"Is what a shine?"

"I mean—are they quarrelling?"

"Two of them are. Your one and Jemima."

"Jemima's Mrs. Pascoe? Is that it?"

"I suppose she is." I think I added that she was not Mrs. Anything-Else. It was my habit to be easily satisfied with whatever speech presented itself for utterance.



"I shan't go in," said Mr. Grayper after reflection. He became confidential. "I say, Jackey, look here! What the dooce have they got to fight about?"

"Nothing in particular—anything! For the sake of the row—any row!"

"I say, look here! I wish you'd go in and get your sister out. We shan't get to Shotfield till two in the morning." That was the name of their villa at Petersham.

I was an obliging boy. Moreover, it was easier to comply than refuse. "All right!" said I. "Next time there's less shindy!" I went and listened at the door for a lull. So listening, I captured small interchanges in the shindy. I could not listen, for it to subside, and stop my ears at the same time.

Roberta was saying:—"Then let me keep away altogether, and *not* come!" My stepmother's voice came audibly and musically, heard against the somewhat harsh tension of my sister's:—"Mr. Pascoe, be fair to me! Make her tell you *what she has against me!* What *have* I done?"

Then I heard my father, trying to pour oil on the troubled waters. "There—there, Helen! You mustn't mind Bert. It's only Legitimate Drama—not Tragedy! Come, come!"

Then Bert again, poignantly:—"Papa—I tell you I am in earnest," and Jemima's voice struck in sharply:—"In earnest about *what?* Make her tell you *that!*"

My father's voice had in it no note of levity as it said:—"You ought not to find fault, Bert, unless you are prepared to indict the culprit. Think what friends you were, when Helen was Miss Evans, and at least tell her clearly what you mean. Remember, my dear, that when you are unkind to her you are unkind to me." He raised his voice slightly, suggesting more emphasis to come. "Now let's have an end of all this! Kiss your stepmamma and be friends, or else say why you won't. My suggestion is—do the first, and let the last alone!"

My brother-in-law, behind me, seemed to be overhearing. For he said, half to himself:—"Yes—that's it! Cut the cackle." I had never heard this phrase, but thought it sounded knowing. I associated it with footlights and flies.

I thought the lull had come, and got the door ajar, feeling my way to entering. Roberta's voice came out clearly, saying:—"I shall do neither. *She* can tell you, as well as I can. I shall not say a word more. I am sure the carriage must be there, waiting. I suppose my husband is somewhere."

I put my head in at the door, saying:—"Yes, he's out here,

getting in a stew about the time." Anderson Grayper then followed me in, his wife saying to him:—"Oh, you're there, are you? Is the carriage there?" Our entry made the previous question lapse, by general consent. Roberta kissed her father, he saying nothing, but looking very grave and displeased. His wife, of whom Roberta took no cognizance, hung on his arm, looking at her enemy more beseechingly and reproachfully than resentfully. I noticed that the red spot had died out from her cheeks, and that she looked white and tearful. It certainly seemed to me that my father was curiously forbearing towards his married daughter, who, whatever her grievance against Jemima was, had no excuse for so odious and unreasonable an attitude towards her.

I got away without much valediction, and found Gracey and Nebuchadnezzar still in the library, in earnest colloquy across a very small table, so that the comparison of the respective black and warm brown, rather pale, of their two heads, seemed a natural one to pass through my mind. I assumed that they had been talking all this while about me and my valuable drawings, and felt confirmed when Gracey said:—"There now, Jackey, wasn't Monty a perfect darling? Didn't he do it beautifully?" And Cooky, looking up at me with a happy gleam on his face, said:—"Yes—little Buttons! And I hope it will be good for you."

I walked with him affectionately up our lane, and said adieu when his omnibus accrued; the last from Putney, with one place left for him outside. I got back to find Gracey interceding with Raynes not to shut me out. She and I had a kind of chorus of jubilation over Cooky's heroic inveracity. But I ended up:—"I'm sorry he thinks me a duffer, though. Because he really does, you know! Now doesn't he?" I hoped Gracey would treat this with ridicule, and she didn't. However, she said:—"You'll be able to prove he was wrong, Jackey, anyhow, won't you?" Of course I should!

I put my little sister's beaming face to the credit of the moral victory I was imputing to my drawings, and was about to retire to my own den when I was intercepted by Varnish, seeking information about an incident I had all but forgotten already, to wit, the *émeute* in the drawing-room. "What ever," she asked, "was Miss Roberta that angry about? You could hear her all the way up here!"

"She was pitching into Jemima," said I. "Good-night! That's all I know."

"But, Master Jackey, there if you wasn't actly in the very room, and no chance to be off hearing! Now, if only you'd 'a listened!"

I was not prepared to admit that I had not heard the whole. But I put in a proviso as to its valuelessness. "It was only because Bert was savage, and wanted to pay Jemima out." I then told her what I could recollect of Bert's words and Jemima's retorts, adding as comment:—"What put Jemima in a rage was that Bert went dodging about, and wouldn't say what her game was."

"And whose side was you on, Master Jackey?"

"Jemima's—a little. But I thought them both beastly fools."

"Now be a good boy, and say it again—what your pa's good lady said about Miss Roberta telling what she had against her."

"What—all that rot all over again! . . . Well—look here! . . ." I then went over the ground again, my enunciation of words forming an interesting commentary on file and volley-firing.

"And she was for your pa making Miss Roberta up and say what she had against her? Why was she to, now?" Varnish seemed very thoughtful over this.

"As if everybody didn't know *that!*" said I, scornfully. And indeed, even now I think Varnish was right. What earthly purpose would have been served by a formal indictment of Jemima by Bert, for marrying her father, when the thing was done past recall, and the guilty couple had been a couple for over two years past, and were standing there handfasted and armlinked, facing the accuser?

An evening or two later, my father and I being alone in the library, during his pipe-time, he said to me:—"I've made up my mind what to do with you, young man. You'll send in your drawings for admission to the Schools, and then if they won't have 'em . . . Well!—we shan't be any worse off than we were before. If they will, we shall see what you make of it! . . . How long will it take to see? Can't say. We shall see how long it took when it's taken it."

I accepted the postponement of the fixture I had inquired about, with a cheerful "All right!" and looked forward to breaking the fact of my genius gradually on Europe. *America existed* certainly . . . But—!

My father went on to indicate a second string to my professional bow, in case the first should snap. I might get an insight into Architecture by attending a course of lectures at the College in the evenings, and then I should know if it would be a congenial employment to me if Painting seemed unattractive. He would not be indisposed to welcome that outcome of the experiment, for he had been assured by my stepmamma that it was more genteel to be an Architect than an Artist. He did not covet gentility for

his son on his own account, but it would at least be a satisfaction to Helen. I knew he was speaking half to himself at that moment, by the use of the name.

It struck me then, seeing him—so to speak—thinking about her, that I might try to find out if he had got to the bottom of the cause of Roberta's vendetta against her. I had developed a curiosity on the subject. "I say," said I, "what was it set it off on Saturday?"

"What was it *what?*" said he. "Say it all over again. And explain incidentally the meaning of the expression to 'set off'."

I considered that I answered this adequately by saying that I meant the evening Goody Walkinshaw dined here.

My father looked into my inquisitive eyes through his pipe-smoke, as if I was an amusing phenomenon whose persistency did not displease him, and said, a puff or two later:—" 'Goody Walkinshaw' is rude, but I don't know why. I suppose there are reasons for not saying 'Mrs Walkinshaw,' which seems the most obvious course. Suppose we compromise, and make it 'Dame Walkinshaw'?"

"All right!" said I. "Dame does as well as Goody. But it *was* Saturday, anyhow. What made Bert flare up so?"

"Unintelligible Investigator!" said my father, making a new name for me convey his opinion of my method. "Assuming that your sister can be fairly said to have flared up, I believe I can tell you what made her do so. It was, apparently, because they interrupted her reading *Hamlet*."

"What! In Shakespeare."

"Exactly—in Shakespeare." He changed his manner to one more serious. "Your stepmamma told me all about it afterwards. Mind you recollect it, to think about when you are older and wiser, and I'll tell you. . . . All right, is it? Very well! It was like this. After we left the room, Bert was unsociable, and would only sit reading, and hardly answered when your stepmamma spoke to her. Well—that wouldn't have been unusual if she had been living here still, like old times. But she hadn't been here for months."

"I don't see that Bert matters."

"Very likely not. But she does. Because she is one of your mamma's girls, Master Jackey. Besides, they were such friends, she and her stepmother."

"I should have left her alone, to read *Hamlet*."

"Well, you see, they didn't leave her alone, but asked her, one of them, where she was reading. I think she said. . . . Yes, I

*think* what she said was:—"Nothing of any interest to *you*! The Queen was the Ghost's widow, and the new King was the Ghost's brother. All the circumstances were entirely different." My father paused, looking at me curiously, as though he wanted to see how the words struck me, without gloss or comment. Then, as I hung fire, he said, as though to prompt me:—"You know *Hamlet*? You've read *Hamlet*? . . . Well—what do you make of it?"

"Bert meant everything was changed across," said I, lucidly. "But she's always savage with Jemima, about *that*." I was sorry a moment after for my own outspeech, which made reserves impossible for me when my father repeated after me:—"‘Meant everything was changed across.’ What was *everything*, in this case?" I had to find words, and I found them somehow, to explain that whereas Hamlet's father was the Ghost, the parallel in the case of my family would assign that part to my mother, and his stepfather-uncle's part would be allotted to my stepmother.

I turned very red and stammered over this, as it was the first time I had ever in speech to my father treated his second wife as the wearer of my mother's shoes. He did not seem upset or disturbed by my doing so, still keeping his eyes fixed on me as though he read, or failed to read, some meaning into my words behind their face-value. He only said, presently:—"Well, it was an unkind speech, anyhow! We must hope your stepmamma thought more of it than your sister meant her to think. Very likely she did. However, she took it to heart. And I think Bert made matters worse by refusing to be explicit. I suppose she was frightened and didn't want to say any more, really. That's one way of looking at it."

Bert frightened! The idea! I dismissed it with the words:—"She didn't care! All *she* wanted was to aggravate Jemima." My father only said:—"Well, she succeeded; at least, if I am right in my interpretation of the word *aggravate*, which has to mean, in this case, the causing of undeserved annoyance to the aggravated, not any addition to weight. Your stepmamma had a very bad feverish night, and I believed she would have slept very well but for that rumpus."

It had hung in my mind that as I closed the drawing-room door on the said rumpus, after disposing of my drawings, Roberta had seemed to me to say, in answer to my father's first words to her:—"Why am I to be silent? Was she not my own mother?" I repeated this to him, and his reply was:—"Evidently Hamlet. The ghost was Hamlet's own father." His tone gave me the impres-



sion that he regarded Bert's outbreak as having at least as much connection with stage-mania as with actual cause of complaint against her stepmother. Indeed, poetry apart, why should grown-up sons or daughters insist on either parent remaining unmated after the other's death?

I think I was right in ascribing to Roberta a more independent action than my father's stage-mania theory would have admitted. For, when curiosity led me next day to look into the volume she had been reading, although the book-mark was certainly in *Hamlet*, nothing in the text in that place seemed on all fours with her relation to her stepmother. I can't say what Act and Scene it was, but I remember that it was where Hamlet calls himself a dull and muddy-mettled rascal, like John-a-dreams, in a long soliloquy all about the murder of his father. Roberta had not even been with us on that visit to Highbury two years since, when my worthy granny's suggestion that my mother's overdose of laudanum should be laid at my father's door might have warped her mind on the subject.

Of course, however, the book-mark may not have been left in the place where she left off reading.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

My boyhood is difficult to record from the fact that my youth excluded me from the counsels of my seniors. Thus my narrative of that passage of arms between Roberta and our stepmother is merely as much as reached me—not a substantial history. It happened that I was brought in contact, as narrated, with tangible event in that slight collision between them; which, according to my father, began in *Hamlet*. I wish, for my own satisfaction, that I had been able to remember more. One does not know how keenly one can feel regret for the loss of the Past, until one sits down to write a fair and intelligible record of it. The Historian is in no such dilemma. He has his authorities, and can interpret or amplify them to his liking. I am especially badly off, having no authority but my Self to refer to. And I do this with misgiving that he will mislead me, as often as not.

He has not misled me, I know, in my recollection that Jemima rose in my estimation after that fracas. That feverish night, vouched for by my father, told in her favour; and in addition to that, she did not bear malice. Not that she forgave. With a good deal of tact—I suppose it was tact—she hoped that one day Bertie would forgive *her*, and would see and understand the altruism in the exercise of which she had incurred such displeasure. I accepted this, without analysis of niceties. But it was the sleeplessness which went home to my understanding, and made me say that it was a jolly shame to keep on pitching into Jemima.

I must have worded this opinion, thus or otherwise, to all the members of my family, else I should not remember how each one received it. My father patted me cordially on the back, saying:—“A very pretty sentiment. Forgiveness of stepmothers is rare—so let’s give Jackey credit.” Ellen said:—“That’s what I always keep on saying to Bert, over and over and over again. And it doesn’t do *any* good! Oh dear, if I’ve said it once, I’ve said it fifty times.” She recurred a good deal to this estimate. Gracey said, “Suppose we leave off!” and evaded the subject. Varnish said, dropping the question of forgiveness, and taking up the sleepless

night:—"Half-an-hour, I lay! No one ever did nor ever will lie awake all night. But seemin' goes a long way." She would not commit herself to not pitching into the Sly Cat, though she never used that name for her now.

She—I mean The Cat—adhered to the views she had expressed about the social status of picture-painters; and I think really helped my case with my father, whose dislike of the subject went the length of a *parti pris* against all consideration of the respectabilities. This unintentional assistance was reinforced by her protestation that she appreciated the remarkable ability shown in my work. It was a tribute to the critical authority of Mrs. Walkinshaw. My stepmother was not inclined to be behindhand in showing that she too had an insight into the Fine Arts; and followed suit, for safety.

All went well for my wishes, and ill for me. I sent my drawings in the R. A., and they passed. My probationary drawings followed, and also passed. Then I was an Academy Student, and had a round ivory ticket with my name and the date. It was lost, I suppose, with all my other things. I kept it as a kind of mascot, for over three decades. If I were superstitious I might believe that it acted as an evil talisman, binding me to a trade for which I never had, and never could have, any adaptability that is not to be found in any youngster of moderate capacity. And that trade the one of all others which calls for special qualifications of hand and brain! However, I am not superstitious; at least, I believe not. An important reservation that, in view of my doubts about the meaning of the word!

Another forty years and the memory of the old Academy Schools will linger only in a few old, old noddles for a while—a short while—and will flicker out at the very last in the brain of some centenarian. Burlington House was still a decade ahead in my day; and the schools, out of the Exhibition time, were in the Exhibition rooms. The way in was under the right hand entry, and there was a door on each side. On the left, to the schools; on the right, to the library. I am writing it down now to recall it to my Self. I think it must have been in the autumn of fifty-seven that I entered that door on the left. Can I blame it, that when I did so *lasciavo ogni speranza*—left behind me, that is, every hope of becoming a useful member of Society? Not every hope of coming out again, for I came out to get lunch.

The first person I saw at work in the Antique School was my friend who had lent me a plumb-bob at Slocum's, 'Opkins. He was drawing the Discobolus as a Probationer, and two other neophytes

were a droring of the Discobolus too; so he informed me. I made a fourth.

All four of us were in grim earnest. Probation has that effect. There were plenty of other draughtsmen at work, or passing to and fro, young and old, all incorporated as Students; some of the latter were Life-students, I was told, who had been at work all their lives in the schools. These, however, were great creatures, learning to paint in the next room. I felt that there must be difficulties in Art—serious ones! These elderly men were still learning—hadn't learned yet! Perhaps it was only their humility, if one knew!

As for those I saw drawing—probates, I suppose, as they had passed through successfully—I was strongly impressed with the persistency with which they gazed on their own work, glancing occasionally at its original for comparison. Now and then, rarely, as a fly occasionally touches the surface of a still pool, the point of a crayon or the bustle of a stump touched the surface of a drawing. The serene contemplation of achievement, which filled the gaps between the touches, set thought on the alert to determine when the drawings were actually executed; a task before which thought reeled and staggered speechless. A fair percentage of these matured students seemed morally degenerate—more reprobates than probates—passing their time in the exchange of repartees, the comparison of the beauty of actresses, or reminiscences of theatrical tit-bits.

My reason now revolts against my recollection of the way in which order was maintained in this school, but no concession is made by Memory. I cannot rid my mind of an image of a sort of dog-kennel in a corner, in which Authority lay hid in the form of a Curator, or, perhaps, I should say, from which it came out in that form; for the inner life of that kennel was as hidden from us students as ever was that of Maskelyne's and Cooke's guest, agent, representatives, or proxy, tied up inside a cabinet. No beautiful female arms shot out from that dog-kennel, but Authority now and then said, "Too much noise!" as if its slumbers were disturbed. Otherwise, nothing happened.

Indeed, I now look back to the Antique School as a sort of backwater in the flow of Event rather than an Institution. If anything had happened there in my time I should surely recollect it. But it only presents itself to me now as easels—perhaps I should add boxes—above which rise into the gloom Mars, Bacchus, and Apollo, while one Gladiator dies on one pedestal and two others fight on another. I wonder, if the ghosts of Myron or

Scopas ever came to London—a city that was a morass, in their day—and chanced upon casts of their own works knee-deep in easels, would they know what to make of it! What would they think had possessed the Northern Barbarian, to complicate his Hyperborean life with images *they* remembered making, ages long ago, this side of Styx, in the sunshine of the Acropolis?

I have every reason to believe that no one of the four probationers who got the Discobolus done in plenty of time looked at the work of Myron in a way that would have pleased that sculptor's ghost. Artists are such egotists. I doubt if Beethoven would have been pleased with the compliment paid him by a young man 'Opkins had known, who had a fine tenor voice. All his friends said so. It was his duty to practise such a fine tenor voice. And what could he do better than get a seat for Sims Reeves at the Monday Pop, and go on singing Adelarder till he could sing it reg'lar well? Myron's ghost might have had feelings akin to Beethoven's, in *his* parallel case, could he have seen those four Discoboli, day after day and week after week, and have been alive to the plenitude of indifference with which their authors had come to regard the plastic Art of their original. I remember something of an opinion to this effect creeping into my conversations with my neighbour, and evolving the particulars of his musical friend's abuse, as I considered it, of Beethoven's song. I find that his pronunciation of its name, as I have written it,—suggestive of meat storage to some, no doubt—means to me four Discobolusses on imperial sheets of Whatman's handmade, two of them done in Conte; and the original with his quoit still unthrown, as sure to fly right now, if only its Destiny would come to the scratch, as it was when Myron got him done, in plenty of time, two-and-a-half thousand years ago.

"Old Lofft knoo Foozly," said 'Opkins to me one day thenabouts. "I don't see anythin' in that! Foozly was 'ardly dead when I was born." Lofft was the Curator who dwelt in the dog-kennel.

One of the Conte chalksmen turned a lack-lustre eye halfway, and said:—"Ain't you sticking it on?"

"I don't foller your idear," said 'Opkins. "Stickin' what on?"

The Eye came round the rest of the way, and its owner said:—"You ain't thirty."

"Never said I was. Five and twenty's my figger!" But the speaker was compelled to admit that the expression "hardly dead" was strained and exaggerated, Fuseli having been quite dead—buried at least—well over thirty years ago.



Discussion of the point grew warm and was cut short by, "Too much noise!" from the dog-kennel. I felt that it contained a connecting link, for surely Fuseli was a friend of Reynolds. But if our presiding genius in the kennel was a connecting link with the past, how much more so was old Gromp, who was eighty-four. I was so interested in this that I looked up dates, and found that Gromp was eleven years old when Reynolds died. Of course he could remember him. But then of course also he would have had to see him. I resolved to question the old boy on this point next time I visited him. He had very kindly volunteered to take a look at my drawings at intervals, and I was to go to his den for the purpose as occasion offered.

This happened after I had got my admission as student, and reclaimed my probationary drawings. I showed my Discobolus with pride to my family circle, and felt that their approval was the thin end of the wedge of European fame. Besides, I felt meritorious, for I had been taking pains. Reassured by their plaudits, I took my courage in both hands, and started by my Self to see the old Academician one Sunday morning when there was thin snow on the roadway into The Retreat, which had only been disturbed by The Milk's wheels—for it reached us on a sort of perambulator—showing how early I parted from Gracey at the gate, winged by her benediction. It also shows the time of year, or that it was next year; I cannot say which now, but I remember the snow. The fact that it had been pounded slushy in the main road by the few busses that had lurched deliberately to town, remains in my mind as evidence that it was late Autumn, not early Spring.

But I know the day was still young apart from that. For the time Gromp had fixed was not a minute later than ten, and I had made so many allowances for so many contingencies, that as I passed over the bridge in Hyde Park the big new bell at Westminster rang nine. My pedestrian's feet carried me easily the rest of the way in thirty minutes. Then just outside my destination I had a fit of shyness—fear of being too early—that kept me hesitating about pulling the bell, the whole of a quarter of an hour. I wonder now, if I had not had that fit of shyness, would there have been time to ask him the question I had been treasuring in my mind? Had he ever seen Reynolds?

However, it was written otherwise in Fate's book. At a quarter-to-ten I pulled the gate-bell, and had misgivings that it would never stop, and that I should be held responsible. It died down in the end, to my great relief, and the housekeeper came, in a

clean apron and curl-papers. Was it not church-time soon? She remembered my face, and moreover her master had said he expected me—for I had written to him—and that I was to go straight in. Mr. Gromp would be there directly. I went straight in, and she closed the door behind me with caution. I was a premature visitor; ten minutes too soon, clearly. I could look about me, and did so.

There was a picture on the easel, which must have been Milton dictating something; preferably *Paradise Lost*, as the middle-aged principal character, with two fingers on his brow to co-operate with thought, and his spare hand outstretched to indicate its delivery to a listening world, was palpably blind, though illuminated by Inspiration. The purity of his white throat-gear, starch itself, was all but equal to that of the two she-Puritans—his daughters, I presume—which was really enough to knock out any unprepared person, not a strong moralist. One of them was acting as scribe; the other, with clasped hands, was welling or gushing—from founts nearest the heart, I should say. I suppose it is owing to some subsequent commentary overheard, or critique read, that my mind conceives that the Poet was meant to be dictating the beautiful words:—"He to God only, she to God in him." Because I really have not a particle of reason for supposing that any particular passage is referred to.

I dutifully went through the form of hoping internally that I should one day paint such a beautiful and touching picture, and turned to examine another, hung high up on the wall. It was in another style, in which I discerned Gray's Bard. I had recited him at school and knew him of old. There he was, on the rock whose haughty brow o'erlooked old Conway's foaming flood; and there was the crested pride of the first Edward, moved to wild dismay on the steep of Snowdon's shaggy side by the voice of a singer ten miles off. I had not been at Bettws-y-coed in those days, and I took it all seriously, and wondered whether I too should one day be able to paint a beard like that. And there, as large as life, was Boadicea, bleeding from the Roman rods, and the venerable Impostor whose tongue's terrors were tied by resentment, or he would have done wonders—honour bright! There he was, spreading oak and all!

Then, as I was afraid to move from the island, for fear of disturbing the dust, I turned to examine the miscellanea over the chimney piece. There was the usual allowance of slight drawings with resolute signatures and margins that brazened out their vacuity; of water colours that had clearly been dashed in, so that you could acknowledge their broad treatment without being fright-

ened, which you might have been if there had been any evidence of painstaking; of Senefelder lithographs and Stothard mezzotints—all the things one counted upon at that date in anchorages undisturbed for a generation or more. But what interested me most was an oil sketch of a boy, not over six years old, with “Reynolds” on the frame, and the date 1785. That boy might easily have changed into Gromp R.A. Yes—that was his sort of age seventy-seven years ago. I stood before the picture trying to detect a likeness to my recollection of the old man’s face—with some success as I thought—and wondering when he himself would make his appearance. I was more than ever anxious to hear about Reynolds, of whom I felt convinced he must have memories.

The cat, who had knocked the books down when I came before, seemed for once sleepless, and came curling about my legs, inquiring for refreshment, as I understood her. I explained that I had brought none, and stroked her; but she seemed indifferent to mere platonic affection, and sat down close to a door I had not noticed so far; not curling up for a nap, but apparently wishing to have it opened. I felt that I could not meet her views, being a mere visitor.

Presently came a tap at the other door, and the housekeeper, in her Sunday best, duly armed with a prayer-book, looked in to say:—“I’m just off to Church, Mr. Gomp. Is there anything else before I go?” She fancied he was on my side of the easel-picture unseen.

“Mr. Gromp isn’t here,” said I. “I was waiting.”

“Lock-a-daisy think of that now, young master! Isn’t he out of his room? Why, to be sure, I thought he was safe and certain to hear and come out.” She pondered a little, looking serious, and then said:—“It’s very like he’s dropped asleep in his chair. Because he *has* done that and he *does* do that, there’s no denying, but as I say where’s the harm, whatever time of day.”

I had no apprehension of anything wrong, and indeed had some vague idea of vouching for the practice of sleeping after breakfast in my family. I contented myself with expressing my readiness to wait on indefinitely, with the addendum:—“I say. I hope he’s quite well.” I suppose I felt that at some future time I might feel uneasy, not more than that.

“Yes, indeed!” said the housekeeper. “Because eighty-four ain’t eighteen, and I’m late for Church already.” She deliberated a moment; and then, almost in a whisper, said:—“Look here now, young gentleman, I’ll tell you what’s best to do. Just you set down, and wait for him coming out. He’ll wake up within ten

minutes, because that's the most his nap'll last. Then you'll hear him move about and just you tap on the door and say it's you. I've no call for to wait, that I can see." She hesitated, for all that; in spite too of the cordial confidence of my "All right!" I wanted her to go, appreciating the dramatic importance of my own position. "I'll tell you what I'll do," said she. "I'll just look in, quiet-like, without waking him, to see that he's all right, and then you wait another ten minutes. Only he'll come out. You'll see!"

She went to the bedroom door, opened it very gently, and closed it after looking in. "All quite right!" said she. "He's in his chair by the fire, and it's made up." The cat shot noiselessly through the first inch or so of opening, causing comment:—"She's not allowed in there, and she knows it. But just this once won't hurt." And then I was left alone with Gray's Bard, and Boadicea's Druid, and the everlasting pause in *Paradise Lost*. I daresay it was then that I selected that line for the inspired mouth to have just spoken.

I suspected that I was alone in the house, and really had at first no idea of acting on the suggestion of the housekeeper and knocking at the bedroom door. I would wait for the spontaneous appearance of the ancient painter—so I resolved—until the moment when I should be compelled to depart by the necessity of my presence at home; and I would then depart silently, leaving my drawing perhaps, and writing from Chelsea to ask when I should call for it on another day. But I had not reckoned with the effect of prolonged solitude and silence.

Even the cat would have been an alleviation. The ticking of the clock, which I had never noticed before, became first a fact in the stillness, then a monotonous repetition of words:—"Don't wait—don't wait—don't wait—don't wait!" Then for variety:—"Why stop—why stop?" And then when these words had lasted, on the speaker's own evidence, a full quarter-of-an-hour, it changed suddenly to:—"Best knock—best knock—best knock!" Once the clock's speech became plain, it seemed to me more vociferous in the silence; as though this was really what it had meant all along, and it had only been my slow apprehension that ignored it.

I tried in vain to rob the clock-tick of this meaning, and thought another sound that asserted itself also for the first time would help me; some mysterious choke and drip that the water supply was, I suppose, responsible for. But its indecisive bursts and gurgles had no force against the monotonous resolution of the clock-tick. "Best knock—best knock!—best knock!"



After all, had I not best knock? Was I not sufficiently authorized to do so by the distinct instruction of an old and trustworthy retainer? For there was no doubt about *her*; her cap frill and the ribbons of her old-fashioned bonnet were enough alone, without the prayer-book. Surely to be able to say, "Your housekeeper told me to knock," would warrant that latitude of action.

I approached the door, timidly enough, and tapped gently. No answer. Again, louder—louder than I meant, for I was rather frightened at the sound. But still—no answer! If that most responsible housekeeper had any sufficient warrant for saying he was safe to come out soon, surely half-an-hour's delay meant something wrong.

I don't think the circumstances justified my opening that door; and I thought they did not, even as I did it. I cannot remember now how I apologized to myself for my action. I can only recollect that I did open it, and looked in. The cat surprised me; forcing herself through, and vanishing somewhere into furniture.

All was as the responsible housekeeper had said. There, in an armchair, was the old painter asleep, before a brightly burning fire. I had no right to wake him. My course was clear—to retire, leaving my drawing in any conspicuous spot, and write to him from Chelsea.

I had closed the door gently, and had chosen the writing-table as the best place for the drawing, before a sombre thought stirred in my mind, somehow reviving my memory of my mother, that day when my misgiving about her sent me to summon my father to her bedside, none too soon. It never shaped itself into words, though they began a question:—"How if he too——?" How if he too—what? I could not leave that question unanswered, to work, all through my journey home, until I came to speech with my father or Gracey, to pooh-pooh it. I *must* know, *now*, though I was taking for granted that my own thought was nonsense.

Back again to the door, furtively! My hesitation on the handle made it shriek like a mandrake root; door-handles do, when one wants them silent. Surely that noise would wake him! But it did not. There he lay, his hand hanging as I had seen it before, impassive over the arm of his chair. I must see his face. If he was so sound asleep he would never see me.

Against my conviction of any right I had, I went a-tiptoe, like a thief in the night, till I all but saw the old face in profile. He slept with his mouth open. . . . Well—what of that? Some do. But that sombre thought of my mother caught at something



in the surroundings, and made it an excuse for activity. The image of Death was upon me before I saw his eyes, still open, but lustreless. Then I knew the meaning of it all.

A painful fascination drew me to touch for a moment the cold nerveless hand. Then, crying for some help, yet knowing none was in the house, I made for the street-door, and leaving it open, went out.

A very respectable-looking gentleman was consulting a pocket-book two doors off, before getting into a compact brougham. To me the words "medical man" seemed to be written large all over him and the carriage too. I suppose my appearance spoke my errand, for before I could shape it in words, he said:—"Which house?"

I led the way rapidly, giving the best quick abstract I could manage of what I had seen. The gentleman had a leather case in his hand as we passed through the Studio, and opened it when he saw the motionless body, without so much as pausing to search for a pulse. I have seen morphia injected more than once since then, in cases of heart-failure, but never more promptly. I do not know how long it was before he said:—"Quite useless of course! But one does it." Then he turned to me, saying:—"And you know that there is no one in the house?"

I explained further the position of things, and that I was, so to speak, a mere accident of it. He only said:—"I must stop and see this out." Then I became aware how painful it would be to tell the old housekeeper. I felt so certain she had been in that position many years. I tried to communicate this apprehension to the doctor, saying, "She's an awfully old servant, you know!" under my breath. To my relief he seemed to seize the idea readily. "I quite understand," said he. "She will have a latch-key to let herself in, and she must not be allowed in here at once." He considered a moment, and added:—"The best thing will be for you to wait in the Studio, and let her find you there. I must remain here till she comes, or some one."

"Am I to tell her?" said I, flinching from the task.

"She will see, without much telling," he answered. "You might say the doctor is here."

I did as he told me, feeling thoroughly frightened and oppressed. I certainly have seldom had a more uncomfortable half-hour than the one that followed. I could only sit gazing in a bewildered stupefaction at the boy's portrait, painted by Reynolds . . . how many years ago? Close upon eighty, somewhere! All the mystery of Life and Time was upon me, as I looked at the

child's face, and tried to see in it the old, old face I had just seen, cold in Death.

I started up at the sound of a latch-key outside and waited, with my eyes on the room-door, wondering whether my voice would come when I needed it. I heard the housekeeper talk to herself in the passage, but the only articulation was:—"Highty-tighty!" Then she came on quicker, and tapped; then came into the room, looking alarmed. "Is the doctor here?" she said. "It's not his time till two." She had seen the hat and gloves outside. I suppose doctors' hats were distinguishable in those days. I don't know.

"Yes, a doctor!" said my voice, and at the sound of it—really I hardly knew it for mine!—the woman stopped, with her eyes fixed on me, with a scared look growing in them. But I don't think she connected me with its cause. I was only a bystander who had seen the doctor pass through—exchanged a word with him perhaps. But why was I still there?

"You'll be late home, young gentleman," said she, and was passing on.

"No—no—please no! Please not yet! Let me say——" I stammered a good deal as I laid my hand on her arm to arrest her. A sudden understanding came into the scared look, and then came a cry:—"Oh, master, master! After so many years!" I saw she knew, and that the doctor was right. She had seen, without much telling.

I was very late home, for I stayed to be of what use I might, as bearer of the news to the old man's nearest relative, a married niece; and otherwise. I could not disguise from myself that this lady and her family bore the shock remarkably well, and cynicism suggested later that they were borne up in their affliction by an anticipated fulfilment of expectations. I did, however, gather that his death from heart-weakness, suddenly, had been predicted for many years, so cynicism may have been unfair, as is not uncommonly the case. She was, however, so emphatic about the matter, that I remember a sort of malicious pleasure at the announcement that he had left a great deal of his money to Trustees, to purchase Historical Pictures for deserving Public Institutions. I shall die, as I now know, much as he did, and I trust this Institution will be the gainer.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

It was nearly five o'clock when I reached The Retreat, and found Gracey watching anxiously at the gate. She ran on ahead of me as a harbinger of tidings to my kin, to whom she imputed solicitude about me equal to her own. I heard her joyously announcing my safe return, and was conscious that the family was saying of course I was all safe, and it had said so all along, and what a silly she was to get in a fuss about nothing! She was so glad to see me that she never stopped to hear what had made me late.

I was taciturn about what had happened, and made no reply to, "Well—now tell us all about it!" except that I would do so when Mrs. Walkinshaw had gone. For that lady's volubility was audible in the drawing-room, and I not only felt a shrinking from public life, but a strong attraction towards the dining-room, where the tablecloth had been doubled to reduce its area and qualify it to pasture a solitary biped with an aftermath of Sunday dinner. It was so late that my reason was saying:—"Wait for cold supper, at seven!" But voracity, with strong support from Gracey, got the better of reason, in spite of the assistance the latter received from the moral or spiritual revolt against food—a thing quite compatible with technical hunger.

I found it easiest to surrender to Gracey, who established herself at the far end of the table with her chin on her hands—how well I remember that way she had!—to see justice done to the aftermath. But I made a poor show as a trencherman, barely quenching the hunger of eighteen, unfed for eight hours; for I had left home early, and had walked many miles. Gracey took me up short, as the phrase is, over a *rechauffe* apple-dumpling which I should have appreciated keenly at another time.

"What—not finish your pudding, Jackey. What's the matter?"

I said, "Oh—well!" and after a very mechanical renewal of attention to the unfinished banquet, "*There* now! That's plenty, in all conscience!" and pushed my plate away.

"Jackey! Something's the matter. Don't say it isn't!" She withdrew one pretty hand from her chin, to point at me—an admonition to truth. "Mr. Gromp says your drawing's bad."

"No, he didn't."

"What *did* he say?"

"He said nothing. He c-couldn't say anything. I'll tell you soon."

"Oh, Jackey! Tell me now. What was it?"

"I'll tell you when Goody Walkinshaw's . . . Walkinshawed herself out of the house." I remember perfectly using this very peculiar phrase, which, strange to say, Gracey accepted as reasonable without comment. Our terms of intercourse were on these lines.

"No—tell me now! I hear her not going. Now be a dear boy, and don't be sprocketty." I believe I have recalled this family word before. It requires no interpretation—takes care of its own meaning, helped by context.

"Well—I will, the minute she's out. She is going, I tell you."

"She doesn't mean to go for ever so long. That's not winding up. She's talking in long sentences." Which showed observation of human nature. Departures chop conversation up.

A visitor was identified by Gracey from the window. "I'll make Monty come and make you tell," said she, and ran out to capture Nebuchadnezzar. He came in, looking as Assyrian as ever. "Do come and manage this naughty boy," Gracey said. "He won't tell me what Mr. Gromp has said about his drawing."

"What *did* he say, little Buttons?"

An idea occurred to me. "Look here, Cooky!" I said, aside. "I'll tell you alone, but I won't while Gracey's here. You tell her to hook it, and then I'll tell you." Telegraphic exchanges followed, and Gracey fled.

I believe the reason I found it easier to tell Cooky was simply that my having something to tell was the first thing he heard on entering the room. Every moment that a painful piece of news remains untold, beyond its first communicability, is tacitly accepted as evidence of its non-existence. There was no serious difficulty in saying, after the door had closed on Gracey, in a mysterious undertone conveying its importance:—"He's died of heart complaint—old Mr. Gromp has. Just before." Obviously, just before my arrival. I did not want to claim too much share in the old gentleman's private affairs, of which his death was surely one. I added, as an extenuating circumstance, that he *was* eighty-four!

"Then why couldn't you tell Gracey that, little Buttons? It wasn't *your* fault, anyhow!"

"No, I suppose it wasn't. But that doesn't count."

"What does?"

"Why—Goody Walkinshaw. *She* counts. It wouldn't be any fun, having *her* know. As soon as she's bunked it, I'll tell them all about it." I believe at this time I was beginning to speak English to the world at large, but I retained my school-jargon in intercourse with a school-friend.

"Why wouldn't it be any fun, having *her* know?"

"Because she makes believe she knew Gromp, and I know she didn't. She'd watercart."

"What an inexplicable little ass you are, Buttons! Suppose she *does* watercart."

"Well—it's rather foolery, isn't it now?" But I felt my out-works weak. "I vote we have Gracey back, and see what *she* says."

Gracey was had back—I think she was just coming—and she was much concerned, on my account, at the story I had to tell; but the fact that Mr. Gromp *was* eighty-four seemed to do wonders in the way of palliating it. Besides, Gracey had never seen the old gentleman, and that makes all the difference. She and Cooky talked over my head, morally, as they always did. I suppose I was very young, even then.

"Look here, little Buttons!" said Cooky, after discussion of the point. "I think Gracey's quite right. It was Mrs. Walkinshaw who wrote to Mr. Gromp for you, and it's only your fancy that she doesn't really know him——"

I interrupted. "He said he hadn't seen her since she married, and her daughter's elderly, because I've seen her."

"What has that to do with the matter, Jackey?" said Gracey. "Suppose in fifty years Monty was to die suddenly of heart disease, and suppose the people at a house where I was let me see his death next day in the papers! . . . Well—I should think them *beasts*! Shouldn't you, Monty?"

"If it was the other way round?" said Cooky. "Yes—beasts!"

"Very well then!" said I. "Tell the Goody, only *I* won't come in. *She* won't care. Cut along—tell away!" And Gracey went straight off to the drawing-room, leaving me with Cooky.

His face looked so still and grave it might have been marble fresh from the completion of an Assyrian chisel. "Shall we, any of us, be here to do any recollecting in fifty years?" said he. But we left speculation on this point to listen in the passage to as much of the announcement and its consequences as might reach our ears outside.

Gracey had evidently sprung the main fact on her hearers without reserve. Indeed, Mrs. Walkinshaw's almost forgotten acquaint-



ance with the deceased painter apart, there was no reason for not doing so. What we could hear was that Gracey spoke on, no doubt giving the details that I had given; and now and then my father's voice struck in, or my stepmother's, asking a question. I did not hear Mrs. Walkinshaw's at all. Presently my father's became more insistent, and the door-handle was audible. He was coming out. We fell back into the dining-room, but when he said, "Where is the young man?" I reappeared, stating superfluously that I was there, and rationally that Cooky also was.

"Come in the library and let's hear all about it," said he. We followed him, but as we crossed the entrance-hall I saw Mrs. Walkinshaw coming from the drawing-room, deprecating my stepmother's protests against an early departure, made Society-wise. I could not forbear lingering, so curious was I to hear—if I might do so in ambush, not otherwise—what attitude the good lady would take up.

It seemed that her gush had not deserted her. "My—dear—good—Helen!" said she, with a distinct sing-song to each word. "I ought to have been gone ages ago." I then perceived that this and the protests were an interlude, and also thought I detected a variant of the speaker in the way she resumed some previous serious speech. "It is so long—so long ago!" she said. "I had not realized, when I wrote for your boy, how long. . . . Yes, I knew it was fifty years, but—oh dear!—*you* understand."

The girls were behind, in the drawing-room. My stepmother understood perfectly, or said she did. I did not. She then said:—"That dear silly child came rushing in with it so suddenly. I don't the least wonder." Then Mrs. Walkinshaw said:—"I don't think it made much difference. . . . Oh, there is the dear boy himself!" From my hanging-back had caught me, and I had to go through some leave-taking. It took the form of commiseration tempered with congratulation, or *vice versa*. I then went into the library and gave my father a full account of my most eventful day.

I catechized Gracey that same evening as to the way in which Goody Walkinshaw had received the news of Gromp's death. I was moved to do this more by my impression that that lady had made an unwarrantable use of a very slight acquaintance with the old Academician, than from any conviction, derived from the few words I had myself overheard, that this acquaintance of long ago had ever amounted to such a friendship as, for instance, her own and Cooky's. I see now that Gracey's views on the subject were much more mature than my own.

"I say, Gracey," said I, "what did old Walkey say when you told them?"

"Let me see!" said Gracey, mobilizing conscientiousness for narrative. "I went in and said that what had kept you late was that Mr. Gromp had died suddenly."

"And that stopped her jaw?"

"Yes. She said:—'Oh, my child! What—Thomas Gromp dead!' Just like that!"

"I see. Gaspily." For Gracey had indicated breath caught, as by surprise or alarm.

"We-ell, if you like. 'Gaspily' does. Then Aunt Helen said:—'Oh dear! And you knew him quite well.' Then Mrs. Walkinshaw sat quite still, looking at nothing. I think Papa said:—'This is very sad news. Was Jackey there?' I said you were there, just after, and he said where were you now? To go and talk to you, you know!"

"And the Goody? What did she say?"

"I don't think a word, till that was all done. Then she said to Aunt Helen, ages after she spoke:—'Yes, quite well, *when* I knew him. But I was quite a girl, under twenty. It is all such ages ago.' And she shut her eyes and sniffed at her little bottle with the gold lid."

"Didn't she say anything else?"

"I don't remember anything else. She got starchy about it, and began to go. She talked a little to Aunt Helen."

"For you not to listen?"

"I didn't listen. Only I knew what I thought. From things."

"What did you think? What things?"

"What do *you* think?"

"The same as before. The Goody only knew him just enough to write to."

"Oh, Jackey—don't be a boy! It wasn't that."

"What was it then?"

"I lay it was what Miss Gracey says," said Varnish, who was present. We were in fact availing ourselves of the perfect freedom of speech that was normal in the Reserve. "Miss Gracey, she knows, and you may just shut your trap, Squire!" This seemed severe to me, as Gracey had made no statement.

I certainly expected one then. But none came. Each of them seemed to take its substance for granted, and to think I might be left uninformed. Gracey said:—"You really do think it was that, Varnish, now don't you?" And Varnish replied:—"I'm your way of thinking, Miss Gracey."

I imported masculine solidity into the conversation—or started confidently on doing so—saying trenchantly:—"What, You, Mean, Is—that when Mr. Gromp and Walkey were——" But to my own surprise, I stopped over the choice of a word; and was even a little relieved when Gracey struck in with:—"Yes, that's what we mean. Exactly that." But none of us put into words the thought we accepted unspoken, that these two old people had, over half-a-century since, been lovers, half-lovers, quarter-lovers, or—say—lovers inchoate. The nearest approach to it was when Gracey said, "Of course they were not engaged," and Varnish assented. "Law, Miss Gracey, how ever *could* they be? Him an artist, and her a lady!"

I never knew then and do not know now, whether there was any truth in this romance that for some reason recommended itself to our understandings. I think I see daylight about the way we flinched from wording it coarsely. It was a tribute to the Power of Decay. I can imagine now, without an effort, this incident of the early days of last century—the fresh young beauty in her Empire dress, gushing with enthusiasm, Byron-stricken no doubt, quite open to a romantic adoration of a handsome drawing-master, an Artist—look you—of Genius, no common drudge! But not a young damsel likely to be led away by passion, which is a good servant but a bad master; only in the former case the passion must be some one else's, not yours. In this case, as I fancy the relations of these two, the young lady may have combined the luxury of a romance, including that of being the victim of a cruel and heartless world, with the satisfaction of a substantial settlement in life. She would never, at least, allow her handsome impecunious drawing-master—ten years her senior too!—to deceive himself with false hopes. But for all that she may have given him such latitudes in friendship—always subject to the reservation that he was not to hope on any account—as many a heartless minx has done in a like case. She may have created a situation which would qualify them to be torn cruelly apart, and may have thoroughly enjoyed the wrench. He for his part may have derived little consolation from a romantic grievance even if he nursed it to maturity. Some men are afflicted, not secretly gratified, with a nursling of this sort.

However, this is the way I see possibilities now, after another sixty years' experience, in which I have known many minxes to become hags. It was that incredibility that made us so backward in wording a story in which Goody Walkinshaw had to figure as the heroine. I believe that Youth can never image the youth of

its grandsires, can never really think of its grandmothers as—to put it plainly—kissable. Of course, says Youth, these old fogies had a kind of working juvenility, to justify the fewness of their years; but that was their old-fashioned humbug. They were overshadowed all the time by the future-perfect tense, and the gloom of their senility to come was retrospective. Look at the pictures of them! Read their fiction—their poems! Old fogies from the beginning, incurable! That is what *they* were. While, on the other hand We are up-to-date. . . .

Dear boy—dear girl—you are quite mistaken! You have no intrinsic newness others have not had before, each in his turn, and hers. Fogeydom of old was Modern too, in its day, and Bucks and Dandies were once the Last Thing Out; even as Nuts, I believe, are now. I, vanishing at last, look back forgivingly, almost lovingly, to the vacuous fatuities of my days of vacuum; the then-new slang that made my father sick; the area of incorrigible crinolines; the Piccadilly streamers of the swells, and their Noah's Ark overcoats. And *they* have grown to be bywords of scorn to you, even as old Walkinshaw's claim to youth in days gone by—albeit she might be conceived of as historically young by us, *pro hac vice*—was not a thing to be spoken without a protest. It was our act of homage to the Power of Decay. The minx had become a hag.

Strong as the impression was that I received at the old man's death, I doubt if it would have held its place in my mind as it has done—through nearly sixty years; think of it!—had it not been for that parallel that Gracey drew, all unconscious of its truth, between her own friendship with Cooky Moss and the one we elected to impute to the hag and the octogenarian painter. At the time it had no meaning to me—a mere illustration! But ten years later, reading over the letters from Cooky in India, that my dear sister had treasured in her desk, those words of hers came back to my memory, and set me a-thinking on that time; and then all this story I have been telling, of my incipient studentship and the death of old Gromp—which else I might have half forgotten—was renewed so vividly that it took well hold of my mind, and the many years that have followed have failed to deaden it. Could I bear to read those letters now, if I had them? When I admit regret for all the things lost for ever, is there no undercurrent of relief that I am saved from the deciphering of any more old letters, and the pain? I have nothing now, and am nothing, except for a few recollections of the Past, and one anticipation—the grave. These will soon vanish, and my nothingness will be complete.

I think that I was indebted to that married niece of Gromp's for a little cruel push—quite uncalled for—into the abyss of Fine Art that awaited me. She might have kept herself to herself, altogether; or, even if she did feel bound to write to my father to thank him, as my proprietor or *impresario*, for my activity in communicating the sad news so promptly, she need not have invented a perfectly gratuitous fiction about reports that had reached her of her late uncle's interest in my "genius." The woman was a liar—of that I am certain. Was I—her letter asked—the clever boy of whose promise her late dear uncle had so often spoken? I knew I was nothing of the sort, if indeed any such boy existed. For the old housekeeper, in accepting my offer to convey the news to this Mrs. Harneck—I think that was the name—had said her old master had not seen his niece for a twelvemonth, there having been words. The clever boy's father did not analyze this far enough to see that what her dear uncle said, if indeed he ever said anything of the sort, must have referred to some other boy, and not to me.

And so vanished my last chance of not being a professional Artist. My father's feeble opposition to my wishes had to disappear, though I do not believe he was ever fully convinced; he was far too sensible for that! I fancy he consoled himself with the reflection that I was still so young, that a year or so spent in demonstrating my incompetence in Art could be well spared, and yet leave time for apprenticeship to some honest trade. I use this phrase because I am firmly convinced that the trade of a "Lutwyche"—the "Painter who cannot paint" in Browning's poem—is the trade of an impostor; and that if he does not become "in life a devil more than a saint," it is not because his professional conditions and surroundings do not give him ample opportunities. My recollection is well supplied with dissolute and vicious units who made up for sheer incapacity, or strong disposition to leave off work at the point at which difficult begins, by audacious attitudinizing and wholesale quackery. The wonder of it to me has been that such men have been so often taken at their own valuation, and have been worked up by dealerdom, and written up by the press, until any attempt to accelerate the natural gravitation of their "work" towards Oblivion would only cause a recrudescence of their spurious fame, and defeat its own object.

I was not qualified for a mountebank by nature, and should never have scored a success on those lines. So I never became



a Real Artist. But let me get back to my story, from which these reflections are a departure.

After the sudden death of old Mr. Gromp my studentship and professional destiny came to be regarded as accomplished facts. I found that being an Artist had its advantages. Whatever omission I was guilty of; whatever I neglected, whatever laziness, backwardness, or inefficiency I indulged in, was excused on the ground of my being an Artist. I came down late in the morning. Never mind!—I was an Artist. I didn't answer when spoken to, nor yet listen to anything that was said to me. Well!—what did you expect, of an Artist? I never omitted to properly brush my clothes, or my head, or to say what I wanted sent to the Wash, or to put out my boots to black, overnight, reasonable; or was, in short, defective in any particular, but it was pointed out that such shortcoming was, or had been, the distinguishing mark and prominent characteristic of Artists from all time. I am certain that some of these vices—the specification of which I borrow in many cases from Varnish—were not new departures at all, but were now half-excused, or half-condemned, by imputing them to the reaction of Zeuxis, Apelles, Titian, and Michelangelo, on one who was, after all, if Varnish was to be credited, only a Young Squire and easy set a bad example to. For Varnish, proud as she was of my achievements, very soon took the measure of some of the casuals with whom I made acquaintance, and whom I accepted with all the faults and errors of their own description of themselves. I, however, did not quarrel with the position assigned to me, as it made matters easy. I afterwards found that the World-at-large practises a similar leniency towards any one who poses successfully as a Genius, especially if he has selected painting as the light to illuminate his species.

I often wonder how men have succeeded in writing the story of their lives, even when their lives have had a story. How much harder must the task be when the writer's life, like mine, has no story—is only a jumbled phantasmagoria of miscellaneous incident, a mere kaleidoscope—or kakeidoscope as may be—of half-forgotten event. Much better not to try it, but to put down what you recollect, and ask your Self—is it true? as I ask mine. You will not get a satisfactory answer, but you can discharge your memory of its obligations to the past.

You will find that you will not always be without a motive in your selection of things to recapture from Oblivion. I have had my motive in dwelling so much on this story of my adoption of a profession. I have wished to exonerate my father from my own

half-blame; my own cavilling, ill-concealed from my Self, at his irresolute attitude. But if I have told the tale truly, what could he have done, without running counter to his affection for his son, with very poor support from the only advisers that presented themselves? He was mistaken, certainly, in supposing that a profession, once chosen, could be lightly put aside for another. But the supposition is not one in itself unreasonable. It is a point that nothing can decide but experience.

I suppose my father must have treasured in his heart this belief in a possible correction by Fate of her blunder in my case, or he would have shown more uneasiness about my future. As it was, he accepted the obvious fact—which came to light as Time went on—that my Academy education led nowhere, with a sort of good-humoured fatalism, making no effort to change the *venue* of my development for one where it would be more obvious to the *ignoramus* he claimed to be, that I was really learning my trade. I can see now that nothing else was open to him. There *was* no school of Art, or at least none offered itself. I have long disbelieved in any form of education in painting except the old one—work done in a Master's workshop, the pupil doing the easy bits at first to save the Master mere drudgery, and then, if a pains-taking chap, being allowed to do a hand, and so on, till at last one day—such a proud one!—he would be permitted to do an easy head, in a corner, and finally be given a canvas all to himself.

But there was no Hubert Van Eyck for me to play John to. If there had been, I am sure my father would have said to him:—"Dear Herr Van Eyck, my boy wants to learn painting. Would you let him have a canvas and paint a lily exactly like you are doing now, and watch you do yours all the time? Because you do it so well, and what you have done looks finished. Do, please, and I will give you guelders." But any good painter of my day—there were a good many—would only have answered:—"Oh bother! Send him to the Royal Academy." So, whatever samples of my work I brought home from Trafalgar Square my father surveyed them, made some good-humoured remark, and acquiesced in them, as things outside his sphere, with which he had nothing to do. I discerned in this, that there were hard and fast lines separating those who understood Art from those who did not, and that I was on this side, he on that.

I suppose it was at Slocum's, in some interval of the Academy schools, that I began to study the use of oil-paint. I did it at the expense of a ginger-beer bottle, a water-melon, two tomatoes, and a rabbit, which would have answered to the description of

"Still Life" better if the rabbit, which presently showed signs of active mortality, could have 'eld on only just long enough for the second painting to 'arden, and give a chance to glaze it up. I am accepting the terse and expressive statement of 'Opkins. The work was done at a disadvantage—he rightly said—because when your principal object is took out of the group, you lose the feelin'. Also, in my own case, because borrowed easels are not to be relied on. Mine wound up and down quite beautiful, but it had evidently once been disintegrated, and its reconstructor had contrived to leave a slot in its shelf, platform—or bosom, if you like to call it so—admirably suited for your Academy Board to disappear down suddenly, just when there was no more light to go over the bad places while still wet. This happened, and I was only revived from despair when I succeeded in adding two big, handsome drops of water to the tomatoes, and a blue-bottle with a shadow to the watermelon. They were Naturalism. But what ever can you expect, when it's Still Life?

I was afraid to carry this result of tuition to show my father. But Gracey did, heralding it with praise. It had quite set at rest a doubt Varnish had expressed more fearlessly than the others of my family, as to whether I had the power to do colours. After such a ginger-beer bottle all hesitation must vanish. The work, however, had a less intoxicating effect on my father than I think Gracey anticipated. Indeed, his attention was diverted from its value, "as a Work of Art, by its smell.

"That's nothing," said I. "Hopkins says it goes, if you wait."

"I'm afraid we've no choice, in the nature of things," said my father, with resignation. "Well—it's very good. I can see what everything is, without telling; and I can't say as much, for some pictures. That's a dead rabbit. That's a melon. Those are tomatoes, and that and that are water-drops."

"You mustn't touch!" said Gracey, as one who knew the rules of the game.

"Touching doesn't matter," said I, as one better informed.

My father, having my authority, touched again. "I took him for a real fly," said he, "and he's painted. Well—there we are, you see! Jackey's Zeuxis, and I'm the dickeybirds, and the fly's the grapes."

"There now!" cried Gracey, triumphantly. "See how well it's done, to take you in like that. Here's Aunt Helen coming. See what *she* says!" My stepmother was just coming in from Thomas's brougham. She had been visiting her Circle, with Ellen. "Oh dear!—how sick I am of People!" said she. "What—another picture!"

"Show it to your stepmamma, Jackey." A pause ensued for critical inspection, the sort that is done at different distances, with the head in varied attitudes. "Well—what's the verdict?"

"Why—ee—a!" said Jemima, whose interjection I cannot spell otherwise. "One doesn't like to——"

"To what? What doesn't one like to?"

"To say." She kept her handsome head in its position to add in a matter-of-fact, convincing sort of way:—"Of course one doesn't look at these things from a——"

"From a what?"

"Well, my dear, you know what I mean." My father evidently did not. "It isn't exactly the same thing as if it were——" But she didn't finish her sentence. Instead, she suddenly became reassuring. "But it's very good *indeed!* Really, *very*, nice!" She tried it for a moment with her head the other way on, so as to see every aspect of the composition, and be sure she was right; then wound up the subject. "Yes, it's very nice, Jackey—very good indeed! . . . My dear, those tiresome Elginbrods have asked us to dinner on the fourteenth and we can't go. And now we shall have to ask *them*."

I can't really recollect what Ellen said, but I find that if I, so to speak, listen to my recollection of her, it seems to say:—"It's no use asking me, because I don't know anything about it. I never did know, and I never shall know anything about pictures. It doesn't matter whether it's landscape or figures, it's simply no use. It's only wasting time. I daresay it's my fault and I ought to know——" And so forth. Ellen always seemed much concerned at her own uselessness as a referee, and to conceive that Europe looked to her for enlightenment.

"Never mind," said Gracey. "Come along, Jackey, and we'll show it to Varnish." And off we went to Varnish, in the Reserve. Because there was plenty of time before dinner. My old nurse's heartfelt approbation more than consoled me for the rather cold approval this work of Art had received from my stepmother.

Many things happened, I know, before my successful career as a "student from the Antique" landed me in the higher level of admission to the Life School. But the revived smell of the new paint on that execrable Academy Board brings back so vividly my first experiences of what 'Opkins—neck and neck with me in our upward career—called *moddles*, in the painting school, that I am carried on to write my recollections of it while I have them, although by doing so I outrun all consecutiveness such as would be claimed by a real life-record of reminiscences.



At this moment I can shut my eyes and it all comes before me, as yesterday. There is the pose, a real Turk with *teste* 'Opkins,—a reg'lar strikin' 'ed and no mistake. There also, absolutely without any mistake whatever, is the fixed glare which I afterwards learned to identify with the first release of a moddle from the leash—perhaps that expression is faulty—and which I was destined, more often than not, to see die slowly away before the irresistible inroads of Sleep. There is the Visitor, who is going presently, I hope, to show me, at any rate, exactly how he paints himself. And there are my fellow-students carrying about their easels—reminding me a little of the way ants carry about their eggs—to plant them down in the best possible point of view. I am conscious, as I allow the vision to proceed, that the energetic decision shown in the choice of place and the disposition of materials flags as soon as the first indications of the great work in hand have to be made. Then do vague charcoal marks appear irresolutely on new canvasses, and supply food for infinite reflection and comparison to their authors. Then do the said authors resolve suddenly to wipe out what they have begun, and do it fresh a little higher up. Because, as 'Opkins said:—"You can't be too ackerate at the first go off."

Then one singles himself out from the multitude; the same who had taken exception to the chronology of 'Opkins, about the date of Fuseli's death. He has provided himself with a three-legged easel whose two forelegs have to be dealt with cautiously; or else, out they come! 'Opkins breathed this fact when its borrower—whose name he pronounced 'Untley—substituted it for his own, which had got broke somehow. Moreover, the hinge waggled, on this easel. So it is no wonder my vision shows him to me endeavouring simultaneously to hold its wandering limbs together, and to get in the Turk's head ackerate. I see him endeavouring also to avail himself of the qualities of a new mahl-stick, with the result that the left-hand bottom corner of his canvas flies up and strikes his nose. No one who has ever tried to work on a three-legged easel, with a large canvas, will need an explanation of this.

One thing I do not see, try how I may. I see no attempt to show ignorance how to use its materials. If any one of my instructors knew how to paint, in the sense in which painting was known three centuries ago, he kept his knowledge secret. If one of them had but said to me, "You must know quite distinctly what you want to paint; then you must make the outline perfectly right; then you must colour it," I think I should not have been so much at sea as I soon became under the plethora of vague



suggestions of ways to do God knows what, God knows how. I tried with solemn earnestness to paint a face with Indian Red and Ivory Black at the bidding of the first Visitor; with all the pigments my assortment yielded, at the bidding of the second; and on an underpainting of Prussian Blue at the suggestion of the third. I was not directed to resort to this last diabolical performance, but its advocate recommended it as a safe and certain way—the only one—to get brilliancy in flesh. Of course that was what I wanted—to get brilliancy. And, equally of course, I didn't get it.

All these methods, be it observed, were advanced as the only sound practices of Art after I had involved myself in a pasty confusion Titian himself could not have remedied. Never did one of my guides say to me, "I see you don't know how to paint. Let me show you!" before I had completely destroyed all possibility of guidance, even by a Vandyck or Reynolds. Each of them waited, I suppose, to see the direction my hopelessness was going to take, before offering any suggestion. When one came, it seemed to me to have very little bearing on my particular difficulties. It usually took the form:—"What have you got on your palette? Where's your yellow ochre; light red, raw umber, cobalt blue, etc.? You can't expect to paint"—this, that, or the other of these. I proceeded to expect to paint *with* them, and cleaned up an area to receive them on my palette. Disappointment awaited me.

The funny part of the thing—to me, now—is that I never once seem to have asked myself:—"What is all this for?" I have certainly since then seen reason to suspect that there is a diseased frame of mind which regards Education as a thing beneficial *per se*, without any reference to its objects. In no one is this more discernible than in the advanced Art-student whose beautiful humility of character binds him at the feet of an instructor, who teaches him nothing whatever, but graciously allows him to go on working indefinitely in a mist. "*Ancora imparo*" is a very pretty sentiment for every time of life, but the motto of Michelangelo's old man in a go-cart meant:—"Much as I know, do not suppose that I think I am omniscient!" It did *not* mean:—"I am not a penny the wiser for anything I have ever learned, but I mean to go on learning it for all that." As I understand, the general tenor of instruction is, while leaving the student to flounder in any and every mire of his own selection, to discourage excursions that tend to disconnect that student from his *alma mater*, who, left to herself, would never wean him. Though really the metaphor of

bringing the *alumnus* up by bottle would be a much truer one in the case of the Art-student, to judge by my own experience.

However, it is likely enough that it was my own airy self-confidence and youthful conceit that discouraged my seniors' attempts to teach me how to paint. If not. . . . But my pen—or pencil—flinches from the surmise that perhaps they did not know, themselves.

I have sometimes irreverently indulged in the fancy that when a teacher's salary is co-ordinate with the number of his pupils, he is thereby supplied with a temptation to prolong their pupilage. But the theory won't wash, in all cases. The interest of the 'Varsity coach is to get the biggest score of new graduates anyhow, high up on the lists if possible. He would sooner have half-a-dozen new cram-pots, and pass them all, than the chance of one lasting six years—a creature whose power of converting information into ignorance was so prompt that he would not wait for it to serve its turn till after an examination. Bland misinformation, craftily administered to assure the ploughing of its recipient, would only condemn his coach, and cause the parents and guardians of other *alumni* to apply elsewhere. I gathered also, in the years that preceded my retirement, that the masters of Government Art-Schools look to the number of successful prizeholders at the Annual Competitions as the criterion of their success. And so heartfelt is this incentive to instruction, that the transfer of a master of a school premiated in his consulship, to boiling point, has resulted in its sudden *degringolade* to zero.

Another educational motive is said to influence the granting of qualifications for practice to students of medicine and surgery, and—supposing it to exist, I vouch for nothing—it is an entirely noble one. The man of real capacity is open to a splendid maturity of practice in the Hospitals, while the duffer only gets in the way, and learns nothing. He will never improve, so he may as well be turned loose on the public at once, while he is still such a transparent impostor that no reasonable person will ever show him his tongue. Therefore, pluck all the good men, and qualify mediocrity, or—if the level of intelligence be low—cretinism. The examiner is in either case entitled to the gratitude of his species, though scarcely so much so as if he were to refuse to grant any licences to practise at all.

On the whole, I don't think this theory of prolonged pupilage holds good in any case so strongly as in the "training" of a singer's voice. Is any case known of a voice-trainer who has admitted the maturity of his pupil's, so long as it was prepared to

yield him ten shillings a lesson? I look rather, in my desire to get at the mystery of the artistic chrysalis, the student-grub that never becomes a butterfly, to the fact that an inexplicable desire to be an Artist and have a Studio is compatible with an unfitness for that employment which it is almost impossible to reconcile *a priori* with one's estimate of the average capacity of mankind. Add to this an epidemic humility—I suppose it to date back to Ruskin—prompting the enthusiast to sit at the feet of Nature and humbly imbibe wisdom from Authority, and the rationale of the Art-student whose study never ends is not so very far to seek.

This is all speculation by the way. For I was much too conceited and impatient to acquiesce in such a rôle of life, and I was not destined to become either a dumb waiter for an artistic development that never came about, or to utilize my incapacity in painting, as the stock-in-trade of a mountebank. Had my father lived long enough, his indulgence might have enabled me to carry out the former ideal, while his instinctive revolt against all dishonesty would have kept the latter in check. Of the two, I confess that I incline to the dishonesty. It must be such fun, cheating fools! And after all, when we condemn a professional charlatan, are we not blaming him for the simplicity of his dupes, for which we really have no warrant for holding him responsible? “Why slate me,” said a well-known practitioner, “because Cræsus likes a sketch of mine better than five hundred and fifty pounds, and I like five hundred and fifty pounds better than my sketch? I’ve told him candidly that I wouldn’t have it as a gift.” Had he been bound to add to this piece of candour that he had just had an offer of five hundred for the gem in question? That was how he had landed Cræsus. And after all, was Cræsus any the worse? For Mr. Stowe, who told this story, did it *apropos* of Cræsus having resold his prize for twelve hundred. My father was a purist in these matters, at least, he drew a line. “I think I should like burglary,” said he, “but not that sort of thing.” Mr. Stowe deprecated his severity, and said that if there was to be no cheating, it would make life very dull. It may be he was right. However, my father never said cheating fools would not be fun. He only compared its attractions with those of burglary.

This subject of Art has made me diffuse. It has that effect on writers. I must try to get back to my story. For all this is as much what I think, as what I remember. What I have promised my Self, is to put on record as much as we can recollect, between us.

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

I RACK my brain in vain sometimes to fix a date, and always end by finding that I am wrong. Now and then I can catch at contemporaneous incidents, and then my memory works the steadier for a while. It helps me now to remember that that year, in the Autumn of which I became an Academy Student, was the year of the Indian Mutiny. Or, should I say, the year of its outbreak? For certainly my recollection is that it was not suppressed till two years later.

I can distinctly recollect that my stepmother interrupted a description I was giving to my father of Slocum's and my experience of the Antique, to say:—"What's all this about the native troops in India, Mr. Pascoe?" I don't think she ever quite gave up addressing him by this name. It was the one she had known him by for so long, and of course it seemed the right one to us young folks.

"What's all that about the native troops, Mrs. P.," said he, asking the question back again. He then went on with what he was saying to me:—"And what did the old gypsy woman say to Mr. Slocum?"

"Old Esther? She called him darling, and said a dark lady was waiting for him, but she couldn't tell him where, under ten shillings. He said what had she had to drink. Because she wasn't sitting." That is to say, she wasn't sitting still. I remember her very well. She was a glorious sight with her white hair and wrinkles, but her ideas of remuneration became excessive when she was excited with alcohol. "She says she's the Queen of the Gypsies, and——"

Jemima interrupted me. "The native troops at . . . Where is it? . . . Meerut. They won't bite greasy cartridges——"

"Well—no more would I!" said my father.

"It isn't that. It's because of Religion. Look at the paper."

My father took the *Times*, and looked at the text in a very perfunctory way. "I saw something of that before," said he, absently. And then he read it over again, and handed back the paper to Jemima, saying:—"We shall have to make short work of

that!" She took the paper, and I think read the births, marriages, and deaths. I suppose this piece of news reached tens of thousands of homes that day, and about the same amount of attention was given to it.

How little we knew what was coming! I think we all believed that this outbreak—which I suppose to have been the first incident of the insurrection, at Meerut—would make it just worth while to keep an eye on the Indian news for the next week or so, lest we should miss the account of its prompt suppression, and preferably the severe attitude of European justice towards the ringleaders.

Another incident fixes the date. The news of the taking of Jhansi by Sir Hugh Rose, which we all had such sad cause to remember, must have antedated by a very little the appointment of the first Jewish Queen's Counsel on record. I can recall Gracey's words to me when we read, some time later, a reference to the appointment in a newspaper:—"Oh, Jackey dearest, had he never gone into the Army, he might have made his way at the Bar, and we should have him now!" For Cooky had justified a revolt against his family's wish that he should become a lawyer, by citing the disqualifications under which his race then suffered in the prosecution of a legal career, as a reason for adopting one in which apparently the obstacles were not insuperable. I have never been satisfied that this was really the case, and indeed suspect that he made the most of his plea because of his strong predilection for the Army. I have no means of determining this now, without risking inquiries as to my reasons for asking the question. My informant would catechize me. But it does not matter, as the date is clear from what I remember. It was revived for me recently by a press article about the Jews nowadays, which gave the date of the Q. C. above-mentioned as June, '58. Gracey's remark was of course made afterwards; as, though the events came near together, the casualties of Jhansi were not known in England till some two months later.

I find that putting these things on paper stimulates memory; otherwise they are in themselves immaterial. I know perfectly well what sent Cooky soldiering—his temperament, and the atrocities of Cawnpore. I can remember, when the news of these horrors reached England, how my father sat reading the *Times* account of them with knitted brow, bitten lip, and exclamation smothered back, until at last he threw down the paper, saying:—"There! I can't read that aloud. You must read it to yourself." For my stepmother had said to him, noting his concentration:—"Something very absorbing? Give us the benefit of it." Then that she



monopolized the paper through two readings, in the end throwing it away, to be scrambled for by eagerness on the watch with the remark which I now see to have been a sort of bravado—not callousness or hardness of heart:—"Well—all I can say is, that if women marry soldiers, and follow them into such outlandish places, they must just take their chance!" It sounded brutal, but I cannot believe that it was really so. For I have never thought any worse of Jemima than that she was somewhat vain and selfish. She was certainly not in her right place as the wife of a man like my father, with whom she was—or seemed to me—unsympathetic to a degree; but not a bad creature in the main for all that.

We others—that is to say, Gracey, Cooky, and myself—seized upon that newspaper and read the hideous tale conjointly. "Oh, Monty!" said Gracey, looking up from it at the dark eyes fixed upon it over her shoulder. "Can it be true?" For she was in possession, and he and I were reading it aslant, on either side.

He did not answer the question directly, though his manner did. "I should like to be there," said he, and his voice caught to say it. His set, white face showed me how strongly the news had affected him.

"But is it true?" said she again.

He recovered his normal self-command, to say:—"Ask your father what he thinks." And then anticipated her. "Mr. Pascoe! Gracey says—is it true?"

My father filled out the formula bad news calls for. "No doubt very much exaggerated," said he. Then, as if he felt he had done his duty by prescribed usage:—"Well—at least we must hope that some of it is false. It sounds a little too Biblical for nowadays—eh, Nebuchadnezzar?"

"It's Biblical all over," said Cooky. Whereupon Ellen, who had acquired a partial knowledge of the matter in hand, but had not had time to digest it, recognized a heterodox tone in a mere reference to Scripture, and said:—"If you're going to talk like that, I shall go." I think she went, *nem: con.*

I think also my father departed, with Jemima. Anyhow, the Club was left alone in the drawing-room. Thereupon said Gracey:—"What did you mean by saying you would like to be there?"

"Only what I said. I *should* like to be there. When it's—this sort of thing, one would rather be there, not here. Wouldn't you?"

"I could do no good."

Cooky clenched his brow for a second—that describes it—as well as his teeth; then said:—"I could do *some* good. I could but

try. Besides—you know, because I told you—I would sooner be a soldier, and die, than be a Sunday citizen in wartime, and live. . . . All right, she's gone." For alarm had flashed across Gracey's face, lest this very indirect reference to the blessed Sabbath should be taken amiss by Ellen, whose departure she had not noticed.

"But you *can't*, Monty," said she. "You're a Jew. Jews can't be soldiers. I'm so glad."

"How do you know I can't because I'm a Jew?" said Monty. And as Gracey really had no information on the point, and I had none, the question had to be left without an answer. Perhaps the strong conviction we shared on the subject was only the reaction of an all-pervading belief in Jewish Disability all round, inherited from centuries of religious intolerance—almost forgotten nowadays, but still active in the fifties. It was safe then to assume any disqualification for a Hebrew, until the contrary was proved.

I raised the question again later, in private conversation with Cooky, saying that I believed Gracey's view to be sound, and indeed obviously so, for some mysterious reason not easy to formulate. He replied:—"You're both wrong, little Buttons, and I'm right. Anyhow, if he puts his religion in his pocket a Jew can be anything he likes—Pope of Rome or Lord Chancellor."

"But would you——?"

"Put my religion in my pocket? Not for anything but to be a soldier. And even then I would keep it in my pocket, buttoned up. Why shouldn't I?" It was then that I began to be uneasy about the lengths to which this diseased spirit of Chivalry—that was how I thought of it then, and do still—might carry my friend. But I said nothing further at the time.

I think it was more curiosity as to whether Cooky was right about the Pope and the Woolsack, than any misgivings of the soundness of his military visions, that made me revive the subject one evening in conversation with my father. I asked him point-blank—wasn't Cooky all wrong?

"As to the Pope of Rome," said he, "I couldn't say offhand. I suppose they would say there was no precedent. . . . But stop a bit——!"

I threw in:—"Of course Popes are all Christians."

"I'm not sure of that," said he. "I suspect the first Pope *was* a Jew. Name of Peter." He said this with such placid gravity that I was quite taken in.

"Hooky!" said I, intelligently. "I never knew that. How rum he must have looked!" For I imagined to myself a being

resembling the Wandering Jew, according to Leech, in *Once a Week*, but in full pontifical uniform.

My father perceived this, and supplied reservations. "You mustn't run away with the idea, young man, that he resembled what that young monkey drew, entirely with sixes, at your Art School. Nor that he had three hats——" He stopped, reflectively.

"Well!" said I. "Cooky made me draw him a Jew, all sixes, that way, to aggravate his sister Rachel with. He said it was just like his brother-in-law." For I thought this conventionalization of the Semitic type—it is very easy to do—was responsible for my father's pause.

"Very likely," said he. "But I was thinking of the Pope's tiara. Is it possible that? . . . Oh no—stuff and nonsense!" I was not so clear about his meaning at the time as the contemplation of sundry pictorial triple crowns has since made me. "However," he continued, "it's a nice question, and we needn't settle it. As for the main point, whether Nebuchadnezzar is right or wrong, I have no reason to suppose the Woolsack is out of his reach, on account of his race alone. If he has no objection to being baptized, and not stopping away from Church for religious reasons—he may stop away for irreligious ones, because recusants go scot-free nowadays—I don't see that he hasn't the same chance of becoming Lord Chancellor as any one else has who goes in for the Law."

"That's what Cooky says himself. Only he wouldn't do it to be Lord Chancellor."

"What consideration would he insist on? I mean, what would he do it for?"

"A commission in a crack cavalry regiment. Provided it was under orders to go out to India."

"I see. Very moderate!" said my father, tapping the ashes out of his pipe. For this was in the library after dinner, where we were indulging in a *tête-à-tête* as of old; a thing rare enough now, as my stepmother was fond of company, so that my father often got an affirmative answer to his question, "Are the So-and-so's coming to dinner tonight, my dear?" with the patronymic of the particular So-and-so's supplied. There were always concomitant male So-and-so's, who knew which cigar to choose, and how to tie their white chokers. But this time there had been no So-and-so's, as Jemima was taking the girls to three stalls at the Lyceum, to see "As You Like It."

I think my father was even less aware than I was of how much

Cooky was in earnest. It was to come upon us suddenly, a few days later.

I can recall the occasion vividly, for all the fifty years between. Another incident was prominent that evening. The Rev. Irenæus Macphail had diffidently confessed to my father his ambition to become his son-in-law, with the connivance, or at the instance, or by the grace, or at the expense—as you please—of my sister Ellen. He had dined with us that evening in ratification of my father's provisional consent to accept him in that capacity, had said grace, and had tenderly, discreetly, clerically saluted the females of the family.

Is it permissible to me, at this length of time, to record what I believe to have been the real reason for rejoicing at this arrangement? It was not so much that Ellen would be provided with a mate of her own selection, and with what I expressed as her “whack” of devotional exercises—what I *said* was “pulpits and candlesticks”—as that the actual scene of this whack would be no nearer than the Isle of Man. I felt that I might get through life, with clever tactics, without being once compelled to hear my brother-in-law read prayers or preach a sermon. As a matter of fact, I have succeeded; for after Ellen's marriage invitations to visit Kirkhowlet were never pushed home, and something always came in the way, or was dragged there. As for the wedded couple's visits to London, they were quite a negligible quantity.

If my father's really cordial welcome of this reverend applicant for his daughter was like a right-minded prize-fighter's salute before battle, so also was the series of feints and dodges that followed throughout the evening like its analogies inside the ropes. Only, their object was, on his part, to avoid landing on theological corns; and, on the part of the clerical aspirant, to steer clear of headlands and quicksands of Freethought. I don't think Ellen made matters any better by kicking her adorer's shins under the table at dinner, or making with her lips the words, “Don't answer!” for guidance in his difficulties. The worst of it was that Ellen's information was so very limited on questions of Biblical exegesis, that she was apt to suppose that any chance use of a phrase from Holy Writ, in the mouth of Irreligion, was an attack of set purpose on the foundations of Christianity.

I am sure, for instance, that my father intended no disrespect to the Pentateuch when he spoke of the recent stampede of families to the seaside as “a regular exodus.” But Ellen must

have thought otherwise, if—as I suppose was the case—she conveyed to her lover an intimation of what attitude would be safest to assume, by one of the expedients I have mentioned. No other theory accounts for a certain action on his part as of one who succours or caresses the injured shin of one leg with the calf of the other. I didn't look under the table to see. It was only guesswork, helped by the embarrassment of the countenance connected with the alleged shin.

Neither did my father intend to deride either Roman or Anglican ritual when he said:—"Why not put down Kamptulicon?" The nature of his misunderstanding which provoked this was clear when my stepmother, to illuminate the conversation, said:—"Mr. Macphail doesn't mean that sort, my dear. He is referring to Early Service." To which my father said:—"Oh, ah—no, of course! I beg your pardon." He really meant no harm, but nevertheless Ellen threw dumb speech across the table, and a fixed glare, to enjoin silence. The subject of this discipline really became very uncomfortable; having merely said, after all, that some of his old-fashioned parishioners had objected to "Matins" as a designation, not as a practice. I think I understood afterwards that Ellen had supposed "Kamptulicon," then a very recent introduction, to be some Ecclesiastical usage she had never heard of—some observance dating back to the Council of Nice, for instance, which Renan or somebody wanted to put down. I suppose the Rev. Irenaus furnished her up afterwards, as when he took her over, raw, she was certainly no bride for what was called a Puseyite, in the fifties. The name seems to have died out, of late years.

I think we three males were much more at our ease when the departure of the ladies released the new incomer from supervision. He became, so to speak, quite human over a mild cigar and coffee in the library, telling us how from the top of a mountain near his vicarage you could see England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales all at once, which he seemed to consider a great advantage. Also, how in the herring season all the manhood of the island went a-fishing, and the women had to turn out and work in the fields; and about Deemsters and Manx cats, in reply to inquiries. I think I made as much acquaintance with my clerical brother-in-law over Manx cats as Providence intended I should ever enjoy; for I never got any further with him than the point at which a knock came at the street-door, and my father recognizing it, said:—"It isn't Nebuchadnezzar's evening. What has he come for?" I didn't know, but would go directly and see, so I said.



I infer from this, and my delaying a few minutes to clear up those Manx cats, that I had no misgivings about Cooky's errand.

My father then said:—"Yes, cut along, Master Jackey," and perhaps wanted me to go, that he might inquire what his son-in-law proposed to aliment his wife with; and his children, if any. For the good gentleman had mentioned that the emoluments of his office, all told, amounted to sixty-five pounds a year. However, I, of course, heard nothing of this. I only heard my father say, as I left the room:—"It's a young Jew my boy knows. We call him Nebuchadnezzar." To which the Rev. Irenæus said:—"Oh dear!" in a weak uncertain way. My father may have said:—"He won't bite you." But I can't be sure of that.

I was surprised to hear voices in the drawing-room; that is to say, surprised that they should be so audible on my side of the door. I went in, and met with a still greater surprise.

"Here is Jackey," cried Gracey. "Oh, Jackey, Jackey, stop him! Don't let him go." She was clinging to Cooky's arm, excited and flushed. He, on the contrary, looked white and determined. My stepmother looked startled, but with a duty towards sedateness called for by her position. I think I heard her say:—"Gracey dear!" as though to remonstrate with a venial sin against Grundy. Ellen murmured feebly:—"Yes, Gracey, *don't!*"

I misunderstood the position. "Because of Elsey's parson?" said I. "Bother *him!* Why should you go because of him?"

I was so wide of the mark that they all had to stop and think. My stepmother exchanged a puzzled glance with Ellen, as though to ask:—"What is the boy talking about?"

Cooky spoke first. "Who's Miss Ellen's parson?" said he. "Has she got a parson?" And then Gracey said:—"Yes. But never mind him now. He'll do another time. Tell Jackey about yourself and India, Monty."

"I—say—Cooky!" said I, with a minim between each word and its neighbour. "You never mean to say you're going to——"

"Yes—I do. I'm going to. I've bought my commission." He had only just announced his news, in more concrete language, when I came in. There was no need for greater clearness, between us. We had dealt with the position, although as an impossible hypothesis. Such finite and incisive action as the purchase of a commission was outside my anticipation; but the moment he spoke of it, I saw how he stood committed.

My recollection is of standing somewhat dumbfounded, for a few seconds, then finding nothing better to say than:—"Where did you get the money?"

"My old aunt Hyman's legacy. I was to have it all straight off and do just what I like with it. I liked this."

"What did your Governor say?" I was conscious that I was asking weak questions, at random.

"Tell you presently, little Buttons! Anyhow, it's all settled. I'm to join at once, and go out in the Himalaya on the twenty-first. The regiment's there—Ninth Lancers." We went on, he and I, filling out what would else have been silence with talk about material aspects of his sudden resolution—as, whether his journey would be overland or round the Cape, and so on; and felt, or at least I felt, that in doing so we were stiffening the conversation with a masculine element, and keeping in check any possible tension of female excitement. Men do this, and account it a faculty for looking realities in the face. It is really the reverse, and a mere means of slurring over emotion, which they think it their official duty to keep in abeyance. My stepmother helped, equally, as a bystander in Society, and was interested in the arrangements of large troop-ships on the voyage out. As for Ellen, I believe the reason she was indulging so in that practice of pulling her lips out of shape was that a problem was perplexing her. How was she to reconcile the presences in the same room, possibly, within the next five minutes, of a palpable Jew and an indisputable Christian priest? Two incompatibles, clearly! Otherwise, I believe Ellen was far from sorry that Cooky should depart to the other side of the globe.

I took Gracey's concern at his departure for granted, and never asked myself why, in the moments that followed, the first sudden flush in her face should die slowly down, and leave it so ashy white. One does not analyze the exact effect of a shock. I did wonder a little—this I recollect—why she fell back from the group to a seat on the sofa, and remained in silent pallor, with her eyes always fixed on Cooky. Neither of the others appeared to notice her.

My remonstrance with my friend—for I felt one was called for—I suppose to have been the weakest effort of its sort on record. "I say, Cooky, though, what do *you* want to go out there for? Haven't they got lots of chaps already. . . ?"

"No—that's just where it is. They get killed, and then some one else has to do instead. I shan't be good for anything to speak of, not for a twelvemonth at least. But I'm going, for my own sake. It's the thing to do, for those that can." I felt that as far as appearances went, only the uniform was wanting to make a show of fitness.

I carried my interrupted remonstrance forward, on similar weak lines. "But suppose *you* get killed, before you know how to—how to——"

"How to ride and shoot and things? Well—till I learn a little of my profession, I shall have to confine myself to running away like Feeble the woman's tailor. . . . Only a chap in Shakespeare, Mrs. Pascoe! . . . But it's not really so bad as Buttons thinks. When I was at Grousehalton I found out I had a turn for riding and shooting. I shall make a very tidy Ninth Lancer, in a twelvemonth." He made a show of laughing and treating the whole thing lightly, but it was plain that it cost him an effort to do so. I could hear it in his voice, and I noticed one thing, that he never addressed Gracey, looking rather towards her sister and stepmother.

Grousehalton was the great estate in Northumberland, belonging to Lord Arrears; who, it was said, would have had to sell it, if he, or his title, had not touched the heart of an incalculable fortune, which was also that of a not very remote cousin of Cooky's. This lady, making the acquaintance of her relative, had pressed him to spend a holiday at Grousehalton; that her friends might see, she said, a good-looking example of the Jewish rising generation. There Cooky had made his first acquaintance with the saddle and the sportsman's gun, with marked *éclat*. We used to rally him—at least Gracey did—on an impression he was alleged to have made on Lady Millicent Arrears, his Lordship's daughter by his first marriage, who afterwards became Lady Rarconey. If any student of Debrett were here, I could ask him if I have remembered these names right.

So, when he said he would make a tidy Ninth Lancer in a twelvemonth, I for one could easily believe he spoke the truth. Saul or David would not have made better Ninth Lancers. "Of course, I didn't mean that!" said I. "You'll *do*, fast enough, as far as *that* goes. I only meant, suppose you were to go and get killed right off, where would be the use of that? I say, Cooky, don't go! Chuck it!" I was being roused to an earnest feeling—roused out of my incorrigible juvenility.

"Well, to be sure, if I get killed right off, I shall look rather an ass!" And then they all laughed at me in a sort of patronizing way, and I felt disconcerted. "No," he continued. "Don't you be frightened, Buttons. They never kill Ensigns—they're not worth it. Time enough to think about that when I've got my lieutenantancy! You see if I don't live to be a Colonel."

"Or a Major General," said my stepmother, optimistically.

"Or why not a Field Marshal while we *are* about it? Now sit down and let's be reasonable."

We sat down and were, I presume, reasonable. I think I eased Ellen's mind considerably by saying that my Governor and her parson—as I called him to her face—were "going in for a talk," which would last a week, certainly; till Doomsday, possibly. At any rate it would postpone that awkward collision of Christianity and Judaism. I am not sure she did not feel happier after reflecting on the respectability of the Army. Such an unimpeachable profession was surely halfway to Christianity—might prove a stepping-stone. And in any case if the interview between her father and lover lasted up to the point of its natural importance, there would be no time left for either an Early Martyrdom on the one hand, or a pogrom on the other, if Irenaeus was to catch the last 'bus for Charing Cross.

There was no excuse for the Club to get away and talk over its pending loss of a member, though there might have been had his defection been immediate. But the Himalaya would not sail for some weeks yet; the hour of parting had not come. It was a bore, because the presence of the non-members was only a *gêne* on conversation. We only made talk, really. I endeavoured to murmur "Bother *Jemima!*" undetected, within range of sympathetic guesswork. Ellen counted for nothing—was not worth bothering about.

*Jemima* had had relations in India, and propounded them as trustworthy authorities about a much-misrepresented climate. It really was perfectly bearable provided you abstained totally from every kind of drink, and ate nothing—I think that's right—till after sundown. Water enthusiastically boiled might be indulged in without fear of enteritis, and fruit was, of course, safe, only it had to be eaten when peeled, sharp. The same rule applied to fleshmeat. This last, however, would keep for twenty-four hours, if slightly sprayed with weak carbolic acid. A friend of a cousin of hers had kept remarkably healthy on sterilized *Abernethy* biscuit. Some phrase of subsequent enlightenments about Germs may have got worked into my Memory, but the text may stand.

Cooky had no apprehensions of the climate. Besides, he was peculiar—in fact, his whole family was. "Bad climates suit us," said he, "down to the ground. In fact, my uncle at Sierra Leon is the healthiest of the whole kit of us. And he says the whole territory, where he is, is festering with zymotic disease." *Jemima* said:—"Dear me!" but did not quarrel with the state-

ment, perhaps because it rather confirmed her own position than otherwise.

The talk or colloquy of my father and the Rev. Irenæus did not last even to the end of the lesser time I had predicted for it. Its metaphorical week was a short one—under half-an-hour. They came into the drawing-room conversing cheerfully and looking satisfied. I afterwards found that this was because the reverend gentleman had revealed that he was the only son of a venerable mother who allowed him five hundred a year and would in the course of nature die. In fact, he had a practical certainty and good expectations. No father in his senses could quarrel with such a settlement in life for a daughter with a passionate Ecclesiastical turn; and the fact that she knew nothing whatever of Church History was all so much to the good. Her mind was a *tabula rasa* on which Tractarianism could be written in a good round hand, which might, for anything she knew, be one long clerical error—in either sense—from beginning to end. It would not matter to her, and if her husband had dispositions to go over to Rome, she could accompany him. The living was only sixty-five pounds a year, as previously stated.

All this, however, came to my knowledge later. When my father and Ellen's *fiancé* came into the drawing-room, I confess that my curiosity to see whether he and my friend Cooky would spit and fizzle, like cats, superseded other interests. I was surprised and rather relieved when, on being introduced, they shook hands cordially, and each said he was happy to make the other's acquaintance. Ellen became tranquillized, and let her lips alone. I afterwards gathered that Mr. Macphail's only comment on Cooky was:—"A fine looking chap, at any rate! Well—we must hope." My father, who told me of this, interpreted it as a timid expression of confidence that the Almighty would see His way to a compromise on the subject of Damnation, in difficult cases. "It would be a graceful act," said my father, drily, "seeing that the difficulties are of His own creation."

Gracey said suddenly, across the last words of the introduction:—"But Monty's going to India, Papa!" My father said:—"Oh, is that it, chick?" But I think he saw how white she was, for he added:—"He'll come back again. Mustn't be frightened!" He then remembered my talk with him in the library, and said:—"Is this the crack cavalry regiment, and is it under orders to sail for India?"

"It's in India now, Sir, or part of it is. I sail by the Himalaya next month." Thus Cooky.



"Papa!" said Gracey, who had crossed the room to her father, and was clinging to his arm.

"What, chick?"

"Stop him! Don't let Monty go! . . . If he goes we shall never see him again." Speaking was good to bring her colour back.

"My dear!" said Jemima, who always seemed to hold a brief for moderation—a correct attitude!—"Is not that *rather*—?"

My father was standing with a hand caressingly over Gracey's shoulder. He took very little notice of Jemima—only a parenthetical "All right, my dear!" Then he asked:—"Has Nebuchadnezzar made up his mind?" more of Gracey than of Cooky himself. But the latter answered:—"I have quite made up my mind. Mr. Pascoe, and I think I am doing right."

This did not receive unanimous assent, I am afraid I said, "That's rot!" and Gracey said, doubtfully:—"But *are* you? Is he, Papa?" My father, regarded as The Bench, naturally, summed up. "Well, Nebuchadnezzar, I'm bound to say that if the belongings of our able-bodied young men were to have their way in wartime, we should have a mighty small army. Every one thinks every one else has a relative to spare. So all I can say is—go, and good luck go with you!" To which every one agreed. Except, indeed, the new couple, who got away in a corner, wrapped up in their own affairs; in doing which they were within their rights. What others, *caeteris paribus*, have ever done otherwise? My father continued:—"Don't get outside more bullets than you need—they are nasty things, and quite indigestible. The better part of valour is discretion." Then he made even Gracey look less downcast, by pointing out that the invariable early death of military men was quite incompatible with the myriads of old officers one met in Society and at the Clubs. A cheerful conversation followed about the meaning of the word decimated, Cooky putting on record the view held by an aunt of his, that a regiment decimated ten times wouldn't be there at all. I recollect also some question of the possibility of decimating nine men, and whether it would be more humane to cut nine-tenths off one man, or one-tenth off each. We ceased being serious, under my father's example; all but Gracey, who remained pale and silent, and made scarcely any concession to a hilarity which may have been assumed.

I am sure, on thinking it over, that on Cooky's part it *was* assumed. But I am equally sure that he was quite unaffected by the risks he was to encounter in the future. I came to know and understand, later, what it was that caused that look of

strained determination, forcing its way through reckless levity about war; on which subject he might have been the British linesman as portrayed by correspondents at the front, during a campaign. And yet—this reached even my unobservant faculties—he scarcely looked at Gracey. She, on the contrary, scarcely took her eyes off him, sitting close by my father, caressing the hand that remained round her neck, and joining very perfunctorily, if at all, in the idle speculations of us others on matters connected with military life. My own experience had to come, to teach me that he dared not trust himself to look at her. His die was cast; his future and hers were to be wrenched asunder, and he could not be true to the resolution he had formed if he allowed his eyes the sight of what he was renouncing. That is how I conceive of the state of his mind, now. Poor Cooky!

Having found that I still remember so much of that evening fifty years ago, I grudge leaving it. But it leaves me, watching from our doorstep my old school hero and my proposed and accepted brother-in-law making so much haste to catch the last 'bus that neither a Crucifixion or a Pogrom entered into practical politics. And once inside the omnibus, there was the conductor.

Gracey was very silent to me about Cooky's departure. Letters came from him to her which she refused to show me, or left upstairs after promising to do so, which is nearly the same thing. I believe our old guardian Genius, Varnish, was the cause of my opaque faculties receiving a measure of enlightenment on the situation.

"Miss Gracey she's in a fine taking about Master Monty," said she to me one day when Gracey was safe out of the way. "And I tell you this, Master Jackey, I'm 'artily sorry for her, that I am."

I hung out a signal of imperception. "Of course, she doesn't like Cooky hooking it like this. But then, no more do I, for that matter. And I've known him longer than she has. Besides, I was at school with him."

"That does for talkin', Master Jackey," said she. "There's some things young gentlemen's sisters have to sit up and think about, which don't fret nor worry them. And so I tell you, Squire."

"What things? I don't know any things . . ." It may be that I had misgivings that, after all, girls were not boys, because I shied off the issue, saying:—"Besides, Cooky will come back all right. Sure to!"

"Ah, Master Jackey! Who's to say that, with the Lord Almighty's eye watching of us all the while? Only I do pray on

my knees he may come back alive, with God's blessing. But then, as I say, where are we? No better off, that I see, than if he'd stopped at home!"

I could not follow this, and said so. It was not a point to elaborate clearly while threading a darning needle, so the reply came slowly. But it came.

"It isn't anywhere like Miss Ellen's good gentleman she's set her 'art on, and no one to say a word against it, or take exception. Your papa may call him Candlesticks behind his back, but anyhow you put it, a Clergyman is not a Heathen, and keeps clear of Sinnergogs and vanities." I adopt this spelling of Synagogue because I feel sure that Varnish's mind spelled it so, with a collateral sense of the wickedness of modern Israel, in association with Turks, Heretics, and Infidels.

"Oh, I see!" said I, grasping the point at issue. "You mean Gracey and Monty can't get married. They never said they wanted to, that I know of. But supposing they did?"

"Law, Master Jackey, whatever are you going to say next?"

"Well—I don't see anything to fly out about. Look at Lord Thingummybob and Cooky's cousin that asked him down to stay. He's a Christian and she's a Jew—a she-Jew. You ask the Governor. He told me."

"Your papa he knows, Master Jackey, so why ask him?"

Varnish may have considered that information sought for pre-supposed and expressed an attitude of incredulity. She accepted my father's statement, but threw doubt on its applicability. "Lords go their own way," said she, "and no questions asked. 'Tisn't like the same thing as a plain person. Then, I lay she had money, bags on bags!"

I can't remember exactly what answer I made, but its upshot was that if any legal or sacerdotal barrier existed to the marriage of Jews and Christians, the Court of Chancery and the Province of Canterbury would drive a coach-and-six through it for a liberal commission. Anyhow, I conceded that the cases were different. But who was to prevent simple unqualified "persons" getting married, if they liked, when Dukes did, whether they were Jews or Christians? "People next door or across the way"—was the way I put it.

Varnish seemed to have an impression that the officiating clergyman at a wedding could prohibit the marriage, and would do so if not intimidated or tipped. She exonerated the Archbishop of Canterbury, as above temptation, but did not seem so sure about the Lord Chancellor. Local officials were mostly open to

douceurs. I discredited these suspicions as groundless, and maintained that the union of Cooky's relative and her noble mate was "all square," and that any similar nuptials might also be rectangular. Varnish conceded the point.

I returned to my previous question. Supposing Gracey and Cooky did want to get married, what then? I found that there was in the background of my dear old nurse's mind a thickset hedge of ancient prejudice on the subject. She could, and did, love my old schoolmate for his steadfast friendship, his good influence—as I see now—over myself, and his chivalrous instinct that was carrying him away to danger, possibly to death. But when it came to marrying, all she could say was that she wished him a loving wife of the best quality to be found in his own persuasion—whom I am sure she thought of as, broadly speaking, an old clotheswoman—but not our Miss Gracey. I had better ask my pa, and see what he would say.

I warmed up to my subject. "Do, you, mean, to say, Varnish?" said I, in instalments for emphasis. "Do—you—mean to say, the Governor would stick up for Ellen marrying a Snivelling Ass like her Parson, and not like Gracey, to marry Cooky?"

"Well, Master Jacky," said Varnish, "don't you take nothing I say. But just you ask your pa."

I took this advice, and the next time I was alone with my father, broke in upon the first whiffs of his evening pipe with:—"I say, P"—a variation this of the word pater, sometimes used—"why can't Jews marry Christians?"

"Do you mean—whether the Christians like it or no?"

I replied:—"I'm not such an idiot as all that comes to. I mean when the him and the her, either way on, want to be married, what's to prevent them?"

"In that case," said my father, puffing sedately, "the answer is more difficult." He considered a little, or pretended to do so, then went on:—"If the Christian gentleman—or lady, as may be—has no substantial objection to the other party, wife or husband as may be, being damned, then I see no reason why they shouldn't be married. Which may hold good *vice versa*."

"But suppose both of them think it's rot about Hell, and all that sort of thing?"

"I confess that I cannot see why a couple with such broad religious views should allow themselves to be kept apart by narrow-minded contemporaries. But are we not ignoring an important point? What claim would the non-Jew have to be considered a Christian?"

"I thought every one was a Christian that didn't say he wasn't, except Jews."

"A very lukewarm orthodoxy! But I believe there is a popular impression to that effect. Now I was brought up to consider Jews damned, and that it was at least unsound to think otherwise. So if the lady or gentleman we are talking of didn't think the gentleman or lady we are talking of damned, I doubt the claim of the candidate for damnation to have married a Christian. However, under your lax definition of Christianity, I can see no reason why Christians shouldn't marry Jews as much as they like, subject to the usual reservations. What's the case in point? Who's the Jew? Who's the Christian?"

"Oh—none in particular."

"Yes. But suppose it *had* been some one in particular, who would the Jew in particular have been?"

"Well—Cooky then!"

"So I supposed." My father hung fire for a few seconds, and then said, with his eyes resting on me, so that I felt rather in the dock:—"And are we supposed to know who is the she-Christian Nebuchadnezzar has set his heart on?"

"Well—yes!" said I, uneasily. "At least—no! It's all *hum-bugging*, you know! *Supposing*, don't you know!"

"Get on with the story! Who's the she-Christian?"

"It was all talk, you know—me and Varnish!"

"You and Varnish. Quite so. And I entirely understand that the case you were discussing was hypothetical. We're clear about that. Now who was the hypothetical she-Christian?"

"Well—Gracey then!"

"I thought so." My father was silent for a spell, in which I made up my mind to leave the renewal of the subject to him, being indeed sorry I had started it. Then he said:—"Are Gracey and Nebuchadnezzar supposed to be in each other's confidence on the subject?"

I was glad to be able to reply:—"They wouldn't tell *me*. How should *I* know? It was only my idea, and I asked Varnish."

"Only *your* idea, Master Inquisitive Speculation? And how did you come by your idea? Perhaps it was only The Artistic Mind, when all's said and done. Eh, Jackey boy? Perhaps we don't know anything? Do we, or don't we?"

I said:—"Oh—well!—if you come to that, of course we don't!" I could see that it relieved him to find that I was uninformed—that there was nothing official in my communications. But I think he credited me with grounds for speculation, as was reason-



able under the circumstances. I hastened to emphasize the abstract nature of my inquiry. "It really was only me and Varnish, talking," I said. "I just wanted to know—that was all."

"And it was a question with knotty points in it," said he, speaking more seriously. "There's this for instance. People have families—it's a way they have, and we needn't analyze it—and the families of mixed marriages have to be brought up. When a Mahomedan marries an Atheist, for instance, their small fry have to be turned into little Mahomedans, or little Atheists. Which is it to be? Jews and Christians are in the same boat."

To prove that I appreciated this, I cited an even greater embarrassment under which Cooky's aristocratic connections had found themselves. The noble lord was a Conservative and his lady wife was a Liberal.

My father received this imperturbably. "There you have it!" said he. "The same fix, or worse! One can fancy little Jews and Christians, in the same nursery, practising a conventional toleration. One can even fancy the little Jews being allowed their little sisters' and brothers' crucifix to play with, and conceding their own bags and hats as a *per contra*. But—Liberals and Conservatives!" Though he turned off the subject in this joking spirit, I could see it had caused him to think, if only by the way he smoked on, after his pipe was cold.

Reflection lasted a little, and then he asked, as he refilled the pipe:—"Did you ever talk about it to Nebuchadnezzar? I don't mean bringing Gracey in; only what people think—Jews think, particularly. What his family thinks, for instance!"

"Of course we've talked about it!" I said. "We talk about everything. We talked a lot about it that time he told me about his swell cousin. He says he knows it would kill his old mother if a son of hers was to marry a Gentile. He didn't say Christian."

"And naturally he doesn't want to kill his mother. Anything else?"

"He says it's . . . it's the Chosen people . . . that sort of game you know!" . . .

"I know the game you refer to. Gee-up!"

"Well—that's his old mother's idea, not his. He says there are such a lot of Chosen Peoples."

"So there are—any number. And all on the same authority."

"God's?"

"No—their own. As I understand, the Almighty has, so far, said nothing, as not being in the interest of the public service."

"Well—Cooky says he evidently can't make up his mind and stick to it. I mean, God can't."

"We have to consider His Inscrutable Ways. However, without courting mental disaster by tackling problems beyond our reach, one thing is clear, that Nebuchadnezzar reveres his mother, whatever he thinks of his Maker. He's a good boy. And he's going to India to put a stopper on Nana Sahib!" My stepmother came in here and the conversation stopped.

On a later occasion, some days after this, I caught a fag-end of a conversation which had only been, hitherto, a fluctuating sound, between my father and stepmother. Her words, at the end of a winding-up lull, were audible. "I don't quite follow your meaning, Mr. Pascoe; but no doubt you're right. Nevertheless, I do think, and shall always think, that such marriages can never turn out happily, and I won't pretend I am not glad the young man is going. Not that I have anything against him personally!" A few interchanged words were inaudible, and then I caught the words:—"They'll have forgotten all about it by then, especially the boy."

This fragment, and similar chance gleanings, were, I suspect, responsible for an impression I have still, of a thing most improbable in itself, and of which I cannot localize either place or time—namely, that my father and stepmother analyzed the situation in my hearing. Why does my mind ascribe to Jemima the words:—"Of course it isn't the same thing where there's a distinct drawback. . . . Well, I mean, if you will have it, when a girl's leg stands in her way. I don't see any use pretending?" Or to my father the question, asked half of himself:—"Ought it to stand in her way?"

I cannot suppose that they ever took me into their confidence to the extent of talking so openly in my presence. I was not young enough to be ignored, yet scarcely old enough to be taken into council without reserve.

Nevertheless, my mind does not hesitate as to what the opinions of each were of the desirability or otherwise of Cooky's departure for the East, nor to assign to the lady a much more well-defined opinion of its advantages than to my father. My stepmother was, I am satisfied, a thorough worldling at heart. But that is the worst I have to say of her. She regarded the separation of these two young people as an intervention of Providence; an incident which, brought about by a human parent and guardian, would have been, to use nearly the same word in a more mundane sense, the merest prudence. A marriage with an Israelite, who had

not even the quality persons of her type always ascribe to Israelites, videlicet money-bags, could never be accepted as a comfortable settlement in life even for a girl with a limp, who could not expect the advantages of a complete article.

I have also an impression that my stepmother said to my father, on some occasion undetermined:—"Leave her to me my dear! Do you think I don't know how to manage a chit?" and that he replied:—"I don't suppose she'll say anything. But we shall see." Perhaps a fag-end of some conversation I stopped.

Whether these fragments of memories are an aftergrowth, of the result of disinterments of bygones later, I cannot say. I regard them with suspicion. All the same I am convinced that Jemima rejoiced secretly at Cooky's departure, and influenced my father to a half-belief that a formidable and insuperable position would have been created had he remained. This would not interfere with a view I ascribe to him, that the separation of a potential Romeo and Juliet might be a useful trial. If their nascent passion bore the strain, well and good! Then would come the time to befriend it. If not, so be it!

There is another thing of which I am firmly convinced. Gracey herself would have been completely taken aback—might even have been indignant—had she known the construction that was being placed on her visible concern at Cooky's military escapade. In this she would only have felt what many another girl of nineteen—in England at least—would have felt in the same circumstances. Add to this that her leg had been, as it were, pushed home to her by commiseration from Jemima, and, as I think, by Roberta's brutal, or at least, brusque candour. By whom she had been told plainly that girls with limps could not expect to marry! Was she not entitled on that very account, to a platonic friendship with an Ebrew Jew, who would one day wed Keziah or Keren-happuch, who would be her friend, too. Gracey said something of the kind to me once, but it hardly fructified in the soil of my crude mind. I wonder at this now. Her comment on Keren-happuch or Keziah was:—"She won't be half good enough for Monty!" Why did that not let the cat out of the bag? The cat stopped there, quite unsuspected by me, whatever my father and stepmother thought.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE STORY

ONE evening, as Mr. and Mrs. Pascoe were sitting together over their dessert, the younger members of the family having gone with a party to the theater, Mr. Pascoe startled his wife by asking her abruptly if she had any theory of her own as to how Cæcilia came to take that overdose of laudanum? The question was such a totally unexpected one that Helen in her sudden confusion dropped the glass she was in the act of raising to her lips and the ruby coloured wine was spilled over the table-cloth. She gave a little scream and turned ashy white.

"My love, what *is* the matter!" exclaimed Mr. Pascoe in some alarm.

"Oh, nothing, nothing, only you startled me and made me spill the wine. It looked so like blood that it gave me the shudders."

"My dear child, what a state your nerves are in! It is that dreadful insomnia that is telling on you," said Mr. Pascoe, looking anxiously at his wife's scared white face. "I do wish you would see a specialist about it. What *did* I say that could have startled you so?"

"Oh, nothing! nothing really! I am rather jumpy to-night, that is all," replied Helen, nervously. "But why should I have any theory about it? She just took the overdose by mistake, it was all settled, she must have done that ages ago. What made you go back upon it to-night?"

"Only I was thinking of Gracey," answered Mr. Pascoe, looking uneasily at his wife.

"Thinking of Gracey! Why, what has she been saying?" inquired Helen, sharply.

"Gracey! Oh, Gracey has not said anything, how should she? What I was thinking was . . . no blame to you, my dear. I am sure you have always done your level best. But what I was thinking was this, that if her own mother had lived she in all probability would have foreseen this possible complication with Nebuchadnezzar and not allowed it to go so far. Taken in time, this sort of thing can usually be prevented."

"What sort of thing? I don't understand."

"Why, you know Nebuchadnezzar has bought that commission in the army and is going out to squelch the Indian mutiny for us."

"Well, but why not?"

"Don't you see that he is merely running away because he being a Hebrew Jew can't marry a Gentile, and that he and Gracey are really devoted to each other? It is his mother who objects so strongly to his marrying outside the faith, said it would kill her if he did. So, at least, I gather from Jackey."

"Then does Jackey know all about it?" asked Mrs. Pascoe.

"Oh, dear, no! Blind as any bat on the subject! Thinks Cooky wants to be a soldier and fight, and that that's why he is going away."

"Well," said Helen, unsympathetically, "I suppose it is the best thing he can do under the circumstances. They will get over it, they are both so young. It does not really matter much that I can see."

Something in his wife's manner jarred on Mr. Pascoe, and he said no more on the subject, but later on in the evening, as he sat alone over his pipe, his thoughts reverted to it. Yes, certainly, he would have liked Cooky better if he had rebelled against that verdict of Judaism. Was it not sacrificing two fresh young lives on the altar of superstition?

Helen had said that they would soon forget it. But would they? Cæcilia had clearly not forgotten her first love, Jack Emery! Would her history be repeated in that of her daughter? If Gracey's mother had lived all would probably have gone differently. No, he did not blame Helen in the least, but she evidently had not been alive to the danger attending this intimacy with Jackey's chum! In fact, even now she did not take this boy and girl love seriously! How should she? It was that letter of Cæcilia's, written years ago, that had opened his eyes to what a youthful attachment might possibly mean in a girl's life, and he felt confident that in this case a mother's watchful care might have saved Gracey from a similar heartbreak. Then his thoughts wandered back to that tragic death in Mecklenburg Square. How came Cæcilia to have taken that overdose? Had the pain returned with such violence that she could not even wait to ring for Varnish to come and give her the medicine? It was all so unlike her! She had invariably rung before when she needed anything. . . . In fact, it was her natural instinct always to insist on being waited upon rather than do anything for her-



self; besides, to get at the medicine she must have had to get out of bed, and the doctor's orders had been emphatic that she was to lie quite still! . . . She had always shown herself particularly anxious to carry out his instructions implicitly. No, he could not understand it! . . . Unless!! but he thrust the idea resolutely from his mind. No, that was out of the question, quite impossible! She could not have wished to end her days by her own hand. She was far too good, too Christian a woman for that, besides, why should she? All was going well with them. Her attack of illness, Dr. Hammond had assured them both that very morning, was entirely of a temporary nature, requiring care, very great care, if it came to that! but not of a nature to create a panic in the mind of the sufferer! . . . True, they had had a dispute the night before, but Mr. Pascoe could recall nothing that had taken place between them that differed very much from many a previous discussion on the same topic. Besides, he had never said definitely that he would not give up his post at Somerset House. He had merely insisted on the desirability of retaining it. No doubt, the discussion had been bad for her in her then condition, but as for there having been anything whatever between them to give rise on her part to a desire for self-destruction it was simply ridiculous to entertain the idea for a moment. . . . No, on that score he could set his mind at rest. But it all remained very unaccountable! very unaccountable, indeed!!! And Mr. Pascoe puffed away at his pipe! But he got no nearer to solving the mystery.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

THE day of Cooky's final farewell was near at hand. It was on the occasion of his penultimate visit to The Retreat that he said to me:—"Suppose we go to-morrow, little Buttons, and have a look at your old crib? Just an idea of mine! I've a fancy for it." I acceded at once, and further expressed an opinion that to do so would be rather a lark. I had no such view, but it occurred to me that it was a good thing to say. More particularly because reference had been more than once made to the desirability of putting a good face on the matter, and on no account repining. The exact expression used was "grizzling."

Thus it came about that on the afternoon of next day our boy at Slocum's put his head in at the school door to announce that a party wanted Mr. Pascoe, but would wait outside. He thought it necessary to add:—"He ain't a moddle;" that being the only way discrimination of class was possible to his lack of social experience. This boy was generally known as Young Stomach Ache, owing to an occasion on which he was detained at home, when his mother, to justify his absence, produced a doctor's prescription which referred to chalk.

Mr. Slocum himself was sitting on my box, looking at my drawing, rattling currency in his breeches-pocket. He was always rather at a loss what to say about his pupils' performances, so he rattled the sum at his disposal in his pocket, and began whistling "Molly Maloney," but never got to the second line. This time he produced a spurious appearance of having stopped suddenly, by saying at the end of the first:—"That's dirt, not shadow! You'll have to bread a lot of that out." This question, which was dirt and which was shadow, in drawings, often gave rise to disputes, and even to words. At this point Young Stomach Ache's announcement caused Mr. Slocum to say:—"Friend of Mr. Copestake? . . . Yes, I meant Pascoe; I didn't mean Copestake. Why didn't you show him in, Reginald?" Which reminds me that, though this boy flashed across my memory as Young Stomach Ache, his real name was Reginald.

Cooky was then shown in, and was nodded to by Mr. Slocum.

who went away to discriminate dirt and shadow elsewhere. I think it was always a *parti pris* with him to hold aloof from his students' visitors. I can't fancy him doing anything else.

I made an effort to impress Cooky with the Fine Arts, by showing him the School, and I think he made an effort to seem impressed. But the Stars in their Courses fought against me, taking to a great extent the form of my friend 'Opkins, whom I introduced. For when Cooky, to make talk I suppose, remarked that Art Chaps always seemed to him to be taking their time, 'Opkins said with some dignity:—" 'Urry is contry to the Spirit of Art." And dignity is fatal to social intercourse. So in spite of my invitations to him to say respectful things of Slocum's, Cooky evaded the point, or only yielded the most perfunctory acknowledgments of its greatness.

Beyond remarking that all the draughtsmen seemed to him to be fishing, only that their lines had no rods, and eliciting from me some explanation of the use and beauty of the plumb-bob, my friend said little, seeming absent and preoccupied. He continued so as far as Russell Square, on the borders of my old neighbourhood—as my mind has always recognized it—the zone of the Foundling Hospital. *It* had not changed, of course. Did it ever change, in those days? It has changed, now, I know, and the street-lamps are incandescent; or, even worse, electric. In the fifties they were really gas, and danced and flickered in the wind, or showed as yellow spots through the fog-bound stillness of the winter gloom, and were lighted by lamp-lighters, with ladders. There is a railway-station now, that says it is Russell Square Station, and I suppose it knows. When I was last there, some twenty years since, although the Square was breaking out as Hotels and useful Institutions, the tramp of horses was merry in the streets, and the hansom cabmen still—even as in the days of Varnish, who attested the fact—called each other bad language from box to box, and deemed every fare too small. By now, as I infer, the music of the horses' feet is heard no more, and the ears of foot-passengers are jarred, and their sense of all propriety outraged, by every variety of sound a motor's bad taste can indulge in. But I am told the streets are cleaner. That is a set-off, although we did not complain, in my time.

But what have I, lying here awaiting the end, to do with this new world that is without? Let me look back, a failing mind that catches at every straw in that remote past, to help to better memory, and write down what I may, before it fails outright. I ought to be able to recall that last expedition to the Square—*our*

last expedition, I should say; for I did go there again, as a matter of fact, many years later.

Getting near the zone of the Foundling Hospital, we discerned landmarks. "I wonder who the black statue's of, Cooky," said I, neglecting formal English construction.

Cooky understood. "Stupid little Buttons!" said he. "Fancy your living close by, all those years, and not finding that out."

"I asked the Governor."

"And what did he say?"

"Said it wasn't Beelzebub."

"Well—it isn't. So he was right, so far. But such a lot of things are not. This one's the Duke that made the Square. It takes a Duke to make a Square."

I became diffuse. "I say, Cooky! I wonder whether the iron roller's still in our Square, where we're going?"

"Why shouldn't it be? Rollers in Squares don't pay to run away with. Ask any thief. Why the iron roller?"

"Because this. An awfully long time ago, when I was a small kid, there was a little girl."

"Instead of the roller?"

"No—shut up! She came out of a house opposite, and Varnish let me play with her. Ada was *her* name."

"But the roller—the roller! How does the roller come in?"

"Why—look here! You know how roller-handles go? They won't stop on the ground. . . . Well—we played at seeing how long it would go on. And one time it caught Ada's nose because I started it too fierce, and it had to be done with plaster. Her nose had, not the handle."

"Well, Buttons, I won't disguise it from you. I think that a very flat story."

"Can't help it, Cooky, it's true. I wonder if old Scammony is going on here still." For we were in Bernard Street, approaching the doctor's house.

"Dr. Hammond? Why shouldn't he be? It isn't five years yet, and you talk as if it was a thousand."

"Well—it seems a thousand. Suppose we go across and read his doorplate!" A harmless suggestion, even if it had no apparent purpose. I made it without anticipating any change in the text. We found one, however. A name had been added:—"Mr. Parminster Harris, M. R. C. S." Dr. Scammony had got a partner.

I suppose we were blocking the way, as we stood digesting this information, for a gentleman coming up behind us said, "Excuse me!" and turning round I saw the owner of the spectacles and

the indented cheek who had come with Dr. Scammony when my mother died—he who had the stomach pump in charge. I had only seen him then for a moment. But he was a very unmistakable person, all the more that he apparently had on the self-same plaid wrapper.

“All right—beg your pardon!” said he. Then, on the doorstep, before using his latch-key:—“What Dr. Hammond? He’s out. Can I give you a dose of anything? You’ve got nothing the matter with you.”

We both said:—“Nothing whatever.” And I added, meaning my remark to be conservative:—“Only Dr. Hammond used to attend on my family.” To which Mr. Parminter Harris said, “Oh—ah!” in a convinced sort of way, as if it was quite natural and right for ex-patients to come and browse, as it were, on the doorstep of a former medical adviser, without symptoms.

I suppose Cooky felt that illumination was called for, for he said:—“My young friend’s father lived close by here, and Dr. Hammond attended his mother when she died. About five years ago.”

“Name was——?” said Mr. Parminter Harris.

“Pascoe—Mecklenburg Square. . . .”

Mr. Harris jerked the forefinger of his latch-key holding hand at Cooky, and nodded apprehension, six times at least. “I know—I know—I know,” said he. “Poison case!”

I quarrelled with the exaggeration, mentally. So, I think, did Cooky, for he said in a deprecating way:—“Are we—a—sure we are speaking of the same case?”

“Oh yes—no mistake at all! Pascoe, Mecklenburg Square. Only—stop a minute!—you’re right. Overdose of laudanum. I shouldn’t have said ‘poison case.’ Overdose of laudanum, certainly.”

Cooky said, as one with great deference for the profession:—“It is important, isn’t it?” And I said, in a side alley.—“She took it herself.”

“Right you are! Quite right!—took it herself. Careless speech of mine—more careful another time!” He spoke as if the same thing might come about again, in the natural order of events; then added, explanatorily:—“Case would rank as a poison case with us, you see, just the same. Toxic action identical. But you’re quite right. Very important distinction. Do you wish to see Dr. Hammond? He may be home any time.”

No, we didn’t wish to see Dr. Hammond. But we tacitly agreed that we might safely leave my father’s kind regards for him to



bask in, and did so. I said good evening, and started to go on. I felt nettled with the medical gentleman. Cooky remained one moment, detained by a parting word.

"Rather cool, that, Cooky!" said I, as we got out of hearing.

"What was cool?"

"Why, talking about a *poison case*! What was that he was saying to you? What was he saying he 'thought so' about?" For this phrase had reached me with a flavour of something like impertinence in it.

"Oh—nothing! At least, nothing particular."

"But what?"

"He only said he had heard your father married again, and wanted to know who. 'Wasn't it the governess'?" He repeated the doctor's words.

"He is a cool beggar. What concern was it of his? I suppose you told him? . . . Well—all I can say is, I hope he'll catch it hot from little Scammony, if he tells him."

"Doctors get like that," said Cooky, to dismiss him. And I acquiesced in his dismissal.

I suppose the fact was that this Mr. Harris really remembered something of the case, and wanted to make himself of importance by seeming to remember more. I might easily have forgotten the fact that we spoke with him that day in Bernard Street, if this effort on his part had not caused him to use an unfortunate phrase, which as good as suggested a suspicion of foul play.

It was strange to stand there outside the old home I knew so well the inner soul of, with the schoolfellow that had so often bid me farewell on its very doorstep—there before us unchanged!—and to be deprived of all right to enter, by usurpers in possession. What right had *they* there? What right *could* they have, compared with mine? I asked this question indignantly of my friend, who suggested a view of the case that I confess had never struck me—how about the occupants who turned out to make way for my family, or at least for its first two members, and joint originators? "They were not born there," said I, rashly jumping at what seemed a plausible answer. To which Cooky reasonably replied:—"How the dickens do you know that, little Buttons?" I did not know it, and had to say so.

We watched the house from the other side of the way, standing against the well-remembered Square palings of my youth, and I tried to devise some plausible excuse for knocking at the

door and getting a peep inside. I suggested that we should do so and ask if some one with an impossible name lived there. Cooky said did I know an impossible name? Because one of his sisters had tried that game. She had knocked very loud at a wrong door by mistake, and instead of telling the truth, must needs think to escape contumely by asking if Mrs. Marmaduke Watkins was at home, and was horrified when the menial threw the door wide, as for a troop of cavalry to ride in, and betrayed her into the hands of a succession of liveries, who showed her upstairs, helpless, into a salon, of dimensions.

"What did she do?" I asked.

"She confessed up," said Cooky. "Told the whole truth, and was not only forgiven, but asked whether her family were Mosses of Grindstone."

"Well, Cooky," said I, "I vote that we knock and ask if Mrs. Marmaduke Watkins is at home, because twice is impossible." I think I derived this idea from the man who thought his head would be safe in the hole a cannon-ball had made. After consideration, Cooky said:—"Suppose we risk it!"

Agreed. He knocked genteelly; and I, seeing a brass-plate with "Ring also," rang also. The door was answered by a corpulent cook or housekeeper who protruded very nearly to us as she stood on the threshold. A momentary qualm which seized us both after ringing—for might not the impossible have happened?—was relieved on hearing that this was Mr. Hawkins's; or Miss Trawkins's, it was impossible to say which. We breathed freely, and could look inside.

My eyes went at once to see whether a new letter-box had replaced ours—the one I mean where the lost letters were found, on the day we came away. The panelling of the wainscot had been made good, but the indeterminate owner had not renewed the letter-box. He, or she, fell in my opinion. I saw that the walls had been covered with marbled paper, showing to my thought a degraded taste. Numerous water colours were dotted about, of a class I despised, which I perceived to be, broadly, watermills, coast scenes with trawlers going to sea, and a cattle at sunset. I decided that the owner was Miss Trawkins, and that these were her production. How dared she desecrate our walls with her rubbish?

If the ample housekeeper had not yearned to be useful to her species, we could have begged pardon and come away. But she was seized with anxiety to be of service to us. First, she clung to the idea that her house was really the one we wanted.

and that she could satisfy us if only we would consent to an emendation of our text. "Are you sure the name was not 'Awkins?" said she, causing me to give up Miss Trawkins as useless. Cooky was quite sure—said it must be Marmaduke Watkins or nothing. No compromise was possible.

Had we tried thirty-two? No—we had not. Would she on the whole recommend us to try thirty-two? "There ain't," said she, "no 'arm in tryin', seein' there went so little trouble just to make the inquiry. But now she come to think of it, the name at thirty-two was Medlicott." This was a damper, or would have been, had our position been a *bona fide* one. As it was, we stood committed to research at any house not definitely assignable to another than Watkins. Such a house, said our informant, was number twenty-seven. Not that she had a word against the occupants. They might be most respectable and well-to-do, but if you come to their names, their names she could *not* tell, not if you was to break every bone in her body. No such course had been hinted at. Cooky said, turning to me:—"Suppose we try?" And so completely had I lived myself into the part, that I replied:—"Yes—just this one more, and then gave it up as a bad job."

I had nourished a hope that the ample one would be content to dismiss us with her blessing, and leave it open to us to depart, without knocking at number twenty-seven. But her benevolent interest would not permit her to leave us until she had seen the result of our application. She came out on the pavement—even on the roadway, to get a better view—and watched for the outcome, urging us to knock very frequently, which proved necessary. It was rather an embarrassing experience, to be as it were pinioned to the task of knocking at a door we were not correlated to, to make an insincere inquiry. At one time it seemed as if we should continue doing so *sine die*, if the tenacity of the good lady held out; but in the end a peppery edgy person opened the door six inches and said, "Hay? Who do you want?" and then to our question, "Does Mrs. Marmaduke Watkins live here?" replied, "No—that she don't!" and shut it with acerbity.

I have to account to myself for what followed, and find I can only do it by recalling all these trivial details. As we fell away from No. 27, hoping to shake free of our adviser, it became evident that she did not intend us to do so, approaching us and cutting us off from the nearest avenue of escape. I murmured to Cooky:—"Pretend it's the wrong Square." He welcomed the

idea, and acted on it, saying we had been under the impression we were in Brunswick Square.

No expression of intense enlightenment was ever so prolonged as the ejaculation of the good lady. There now! If we had only a said Brunswick she would have known where she was. Under those circumstances untold gold would not have induced her to conceal the fact that she was in absolute ignorance of the names of the occupants of Brunswick Square. She seemed proud of this ignorance, but I cannot tell why. She dwelt upon it at unnecessary length, and would never have stopped, I believe, if a strong smell of a chimney on fire had not asserted itself, and taken her mind off.

It is commonly thought, by any person who smells a chimney on fire, that it is some one else's chimney. The stout cook shared this impression, and was at ease. "Not but what," she said, "all are liable, and it might easy have been ours, I do admit. Only being swep' by contrack, by my advice and a new rule since I come, and doubtful if satisfactory to the Missis, my ketching chimney is out of the question, as you might say."

Nevertheless, on stepping back across the road to assign its source to a volume of very thick, dirty white smoke which came with a rush down the front of the house, it was perfectly clear to us where it came from. "That's *our* kitchen chimney. Cooky," said I, and I believe the fat one conceived that this speech was youthful impertinence. She had, however, other business on hand—the defence of her system. "Why, it was only swep' the other day, just after the family left, and them expected any minute! And by contrack!" The frequency of chimney-fires immediately after the sweep's visit raises the question of whether chimney-sweeping is a safe practice.

The good woman's policy was one of no surrender, even to confutation itself. She went away to acquaint next door that their chimney was afire, and they might get the engines if they liked, only there was no 'urry, because they always come of themselves if let alone. She got involved in argument with next door, whose parlourmaid undertook to establish a negation that their chimney was not on fire, while she herself maintained that it must be, *because* of the impossibility of her own chimney being the guilty one. At this juncture an idea crossed my friend's mind. Why should we not seize the opportunity the fire afforded of getting a sight of the interior of the old house? Fire justifies intrusion, or at least palliates it.

I jumped at the suggestion. Calling out to the disputants:—

"It is here, and if it isn't put out you'll have the house on fire." we went straight in at the still open door and down into the kitchen, so quickly that when the fat cook, who followed us, arrived panting, and mixing protest with gratitude of a sort, Cooky and I were standing on each side of the fireplace, holding an outstretched square of carpet across it to stifle the draught, to the great admiration of a young woman who seemed at first to be the only person in the house except herself. There was, however, one other, as appeared presently—an old acquaintance of mine.

The fire-brigade came of itself, but prophylactically. It settled down outside, and hatched the scene of the disaster; abetted, or hindered as might be, by boys, who explained to one another the details of fire-engines, being themselves unacquainted therewith. Its representative came in and went upstairs, to make sure the fire had kept inside the chimney.

It is, I believe, generally known that there are two schools of fire-extinction, at least as regards chimneys. One of these schools considers that the true aim of its operations should be to suppress combustion in the flue at all costs. The other that it should circumscribe to the utmost the natural desire of burning soot to set alight to everything else, but should fool it to the top of its bent so long as it made no effort to get outside its allotted field of operations. The former school will risk its life on sloping roofs to hold a sack down over a blazing chimney; while its acolytes, myrmidons, or casual allies endeavour to hermetically seal the flue below with carpets or blankets or periodicals. The succour attempted by Cooky and myself was an adoption of its tenets. But the brigade leaned towards those of the latter school.

"That don't do any good!" was its opinion of our efforts. "You'll only keep it on hand longer. A bit of fire in the flue don't matter any so much, so long as there's no timber in the chimney." Its exponent added that the upstairs wall was nothing out of the way hot, and one of his mates moreover was keeping an eye on it. So we discontinued our efforts, and he settled down peacefully to make a report, after a last word:—"Not the first time *this* flue's been alight, by many!"

It was then that I became aware that a face I knew had appeared out of the back wash'us, or some cellar beyond. It was a face that made me seriously doubt whether I was not asleep and dreaming. It was so very strange to be in the kitchen of our old house, with The Man, Freeman, there in the flesh before me. For there could be no doubt of his identity. Shrunk, and abated, somewhat



redder about the nose, and shabbier in garments mysteriously identical with those I had known him in five years ago, he was the same Man, beyond a doubt. The same aroma, or flavour of beer as of old clung to him, and seemed, strangely enough, to have its share in producing the hallucination that he was sober and steady. He was greyer, surely, since my day in the Square, and baldness was just feeling for a place at the top of his head. Both these changes tended to produce an impression—a very vague one—that their subject was a Member of a Denomination. It also struck me that he abased himself more than formerly, as he addressed me, which he did as soon as I caught his eye.

“Master Eustace—excusin’ me if mistook—only the many times I’ve blacked your boots! And sim’lar Master Moss, if I might make so bold——” We both whistled astonishment and looked at each other. We managed to say conjointly, somehow, that if this wasn’t Freeman, we were blest, or would be hanged—I forget which.

Neither was our immediate destiny. For it was Freeman, asking after The Master, meaning my father. And I became aware that he had established himself on the same footing with the new tenants, as formerly with my own family, by overhearing the words:—“Well, I declare if he ain’t talking to The Man!” And yet I don’t believe he had ever specifically laid claim to the designation.

I did not talk to The Man at great length, not feeling certain how much affection I was bound to show to him. He referred to his indebtedness to my father, to whose certificate of his honesty and sobriety he owed his present position. Not but what some might ’old he went with the ’ouse, after such a many years. But he was making no claim, from constitutional modesty. My father’s letter seemed to have been accepted as a guarantee of its subject’s temperance, without critical analysis. It said he had “become a teetotaller fifteen years ago,” which was true. But it should have added that he had become a teetotaller several times since, having, of course, each time qualified for doing so in the interim.

The stout cook seemed only capable of receiving one idea at a time, and had allotted to us the character of frustrated seekers for Mrs. Marmaduke Watkins. So whether she knew then, or came to know later, that the house was the home of my boyhood, I cannot say. The fireman, after jotting down some memoranda for his official report, said—as though another fire expected him—that it was about time he was hooking it, but that before he did

so he would run upstairs and have a look at how his mate was going on.

This was too good an opportunity for us to lose of seeing the old familiar upper regions again; so, as no opposition was offered to our doing so, we followed him, and were accompanied by Mr. Freeman, who seemed to assume a proprietorship in the house; in fact, to become a kind of representative of Mr. Hawkins, whoever he was.

The fireman's mate was eating an apple and looking out of the front attic window. What he said was, "It don't work out anywhere. I've had a look on the roof," but seemed preoccupied with the apple. The other walked about the wall with his hands, hunting for developments of heat. "Don't come to much!" was his comment.

Mr. Freeman indicated, by a succession of nods, and a visible practice of silence, that he could disclose volumes if he chose. The fireman invited him to speech indirectly, in the words:—"Don't holler too loud, or I shan't hear what you say." Whereupon Mr. Freeman replied substantially, that he had been in the confidence of that kitchen chimney for twenty years past; and barring once, follerin' on a new cook, it had discharged its duty efficiently, and its smoke into the zenith, and never so much as caught alight once. Further, he could testify that after this exceptional lapse, the wall had been examined by a builder, to remove a joist that had scorched, being too near the live sut in the flue. He put in a trimmer to make good, did that builder; and if there warn't a box stood on the place, the observant eye might trace his handiwork by the run of the nails on the floor-board.

The word of the senior fireman to the apple-eater was "ketch hold!" and the box was elsewhere instantly. I don't think the apple was lost; it stood over. The floor proved to be as described and the fireman admitted that Mr. Freeman was right, though by some unaccountable accident. He departed, leaving his mate on guard, and we went downstairs. I am pretty sure that I had not noticed at the time an extraordinary resemblance of the box to the celebrated box from which Mr. Freeman had unpacked Euterpe and Calliope. But not *quite* sure. Because my powers of recognizing it were paralyzed by the *a priori* subconscious certainty that it could not be that box, strangling the entry of the perception to my mind on its threshold, that it *was*.

It was strange and uncomfortable to look in at old rooms I remembered so well—for I could not resist the temptation to

do so, and no one prevented me—and to perceive how they had been transfigured by sacrilegious Hawkins, whoever he was. He had had the impertinence to allow that fat cook to sleep in my Chemistry Room; so I judged from its regrettable slovenliness and a consciousness that the window had not been opened, and perhaps from a bonnet on the bed with imperial purple ribbons. He had covered the walls with luxuriant papers whose price I felt certain had been nicely apportioned to the prospective occupants of the rooms they covered, that cook's being a triumph of cheapness. His ideas of furniture were beneath contempt, and he had put all the beds and wardrobes in the wrong places. Still, I am not sure I did not feel grateful to him for the way he had arranged, or deranged, the room my mother died in. Any similarity would have seemed an intentional disregard of the feelings of survivors. I only got a very hurried peep into my father's old library, as Cooky urged despatch. "Suppose the family comes home," said he, "how shall we explain ourselves—looking into the rooms?" I saw that any excursion outside the immediate province of casual fire-extinguishers would seem unwarrantable, and followed him into the street, unnoticed further of any inmate except Mr. Freeman, of whom we presently became aware, close behind us, touching his hat. "Ast your pardon, Master Eustace," said he, "for follerin' of you, but the opportunity seemed 'andy to mention about them boxes."

"Which boxes?"

"Well—they you see. They don't consarn me, and in course I've work enough to do minding my own business, as you might say. But it don't cost nothin' to mention a box or two, or maybe three, if it comes to that."

My subconscious certainty about that box began to waver. "Why—you don't meana to say that's the same box?" said I.

"The very self-same identical Lord-love-you-as-ever-you-was-born box, Master Eustace! Never been moved out of that very hattick where it stood all your pa's time, and who so well as me knows it, having unpacked it with these two 'ands?" He spread them out in testimony. "And what is more nailed it to again, all but a pie-god and some skeweriosities in the knife-line. Only you was too young, Master Eustace, for to notice partick'lars."

"No I wasn't. At least, I was rather a kid the first time. How comes the box to be there now? Anything else in it? Anything of value?"

"Not that I could speak to. Unless it's a Horrory. But I made bold to mention it, seein' I owe my present foot'old in the

'ouse to the Master's recommendation, and the goods is more like than not to get theirselves lost sight of."

"But how did they come there? I mean how comes it they are there still? I thought they had gone to my granny's ages ago."

"So anybody would! But they ain't, nor yet they won't, unless sent for. You may put your money on that. Now, like I understand it, it went this way. After the family left, this new lot come in, 'Awkins by name, and says, they says, 'What's all these here boxes,' they says. And some on 'em up and says, 'Tis the last peoples not took 'em away,' they says. Then Governor 'Awkins, he says, 'Mind you give me a nudge, my dear,' he says, 'about these here boxes, next time I'm commoonicating with the late owner,' he says, 'and I'll let him know to send for 'em. 'Cos I ain't a-going to pay no carriage on 'em,' he says, 'for one!' It was Huntidy Jane told me that, our 'ousemaid at the time, three lots afore this one. And she let on the boxes was there still six weeks after, and she mentioned 'em to the missus. And the missus she says:—"Dear me, how very neglectful! But they can wait a few days longer, now it's been so long!" And then they got stood over, and got stood over, till they just stood theirselves over and no questions asked. And there they are. Only no 'arm in mentionin' of 'em, that I see." As I detected in Mr. Freeman's manner a combative tone of resentment, quite unprovoked, I hastened to assure him that his own conduct had been faultless throughout, in a position requiring a rare combination of intrepidity and reserve. He seemed partly satisfied; but not wholly, to judge by the manner in which he said there was a many would 'ave 'eld their tongues.

As Cooky had spent the previous evening at The Retreat, he did not return there with me after this expedition. But I narrated the whole of it to my family, and was congratulated on the singular chance which had given me such a much completer entry into our old house than I had any right to expect. My sister Roberta and her husband were paying us one of their rare visits that evening—its object was that they should become better acquainted with their future brother-in-law, Ellen's parson—and my narrative gave rise to passages of arms between her and her step-mother, which I think might have been avoided had Roberta shown a more conciliatory disposition towards Jemima, who, after all, had been the great friend of her early youth, and with whom she had no quarrel except her marriage with my father, which had, so far, only conduced to his comfort and happiness.

I told my story at dinner, and no doubt was thrown on its veracity except by Roberta, who received it coldly, and went the length of saying across the table to her husband:—"I suppose you know that you mustn't believe above half of this boy's romances?" He laughed uneasily, as one between two fires, but I think got away cleverly, saying:—"What—not exactly Gospel—eh?" This made Ellen uncomfortable, and I feel sure she trod on the Rev. Irenæus' toe about it, spoiling a look of humorous condonation of lax speech, which he would otherwise have got through safely. Gracey took my part at once, saying:—"Nonsense! Why not the kitchen chimney on fire? And of course they went in, to help." My father deprecated a too close examination of the story, not to hamper the narrator.

Smoking-time in my father's library that evening only remains in my memory in connection with his benevolent desire to establish peaceful relations between his actual and potential sons-in-law. The attempt proved fruitless; indeed the conditions were impossible. If they could have quarrelled and fought, Anderson and Irenæus would have done much better. But what between the club manners of the former and the Christian meekness of the latter, it was a hard task to discover a *modus vivendi*, and my father gave it up, and fell back on topics of the day. There was always the Indian Mutiny. But there was nothing to prolong the symposium beyond the duration of one pipe for my father and a small cigar for my brother-in-law. And a condition that made both of them anxious to shorten it was the way in which conversation in the drawing-room made itself felt, causing my father to say to me, aside:—"I hope they haven't come to loggerheads again."

They had, and the fact was painfully clear to us males when we entered the room. What had been the controversy became a sudden constrained stillness, and Roberta, as it seemed to me, made matters worse by saying to Europe generally:—"Perhaps we had better talk of something else." But for this, it would have been possible to sustain a colourable pretext of faith in milk and honey and olive branches. As it was, I was not surprised that, when my father, having put some *solto voce* question to my step-mother, pressed for a reply to it in spite of her, "I'll tell you presently," they should carry on aside a conversation of which her share evidently was a version of the loggerhead we had interrupted. On her part it was tearful and tremulous; on his, pacificatory at first; then impressed, with a background of resolution taking form. Nor was I surprised that Ellen should insulate her



parson to give him *her* version, and instruct him—I suppose—in the attitude he should assume. But I was when Gracey evaded answer to an inquiry from me as to what “the row” was, by saying:—“No, Jackey dear, I shan’t talk about it. At least—*wait!*”

I overheard Roberta say to her husband, “It’s very easy to talk, but if you knew what I know——” followed by something I could not catch, and some under-talk between them. She was quite white with anger, or emotion of some sort, and her words shook on her lips. He raised his voice a little over hers, so I heard his words:—“Of course you can’t say *that* to your father. I quite see that. But the whole thing is nonsense—sheer nonsense!” To which she replied, in a tone of savage suppression:—“We shall see!”

The recollection remains with me as a light on the character of Roberta, its unruly violence and utter want of forgiveness. For what had her old friend done to be the object of such prolonged resentment? She had married a widower—certainly not against his will—and possibly for the sake of his daughters, who were just at the time of life when the need for a mother is most felt. The same thing very commonly happens, under the same circumstances. The big parson who comes here to take the duties occasionally—with whom I often get a more intimate talk than I have had with any man for years—has told me how he just escaped having to marry his sister-in-law because his suffragan would not allow her to live in the same house to mother over his daughters, as she had done since his first wife died in their babyhood. My father’s marriage with Jemima has seemed to me at times almost as natural as though she had had a blood-kinship with us children.\* I am, of course, speaking of times when my insight into her character still remained practically what it was at the date of what I am narrating. Roberta no doubt knew her better than I did, but I cannot believe that she did know anything to warrant the revengeful spirit which she certainly showed.

As Gracey had stood over comparison of notes on the subject, I had no choice but to remain an outsider. I was very little the wiser as to what the breeze had been about in our absence when, after the departure of the guests, I went with my father into the library, to sanction with my presence his deferred second pipe, which he had sacrificed in order to appear as peacemaker in the drawing-room. I got no enlightenment from him, for he only said, in reply to cautious inquiry:—Bert and your stepmamma misunderstood one another. They always do.” Then he brushed

the subject aside. "Now tell me some more about the Square. Just fancy those boxes being there still! Are you sure they were the same?"

"Freeman is," said I. "But then of course he drinks. I was only a kid."

"But you thought you did recollect the box."

"Oh yes—I thought so fast enough."

"Well—it's very funny. That's all I can say." He paused a few seconds, recollecting "I wrote to your worthy Uncle Francis about them, enclosing the value of the ornaments I had taken from the—double the value, Stowe said—and your uncle sent me a formal receipt and said he noted the contents of my letter. Nothing further transpired."

I referred to Mr. Freeman's report of Untidy Jane's observations of the attitude of the Hawkins family towards these boxes.

"I think I see how the thing may have happened," said my father. "Probably when your uncle took possession of the house, to hand it over to Hawkins, who has bought the lease, he took good care to ascertain that nothing of value was left in these celebrated boxes, and put the lids on and left them, promising to send for them, and forgot all about them. Purposely, I mean! The devolution of absolutely valueless lumber to others is a leading instinct of laziness."

I could think of nothing better to say than:—"I suppose you'll have to write and say we saw them?" I wanted him to talk about the *emeute* in the drawing-room.

But his mind was on those boxes. "Hardly necessary!" said he. "I wrote about them, and he noted the contents of my letter. That seems to me to exhaust the subject." Besides, it's so long ago." He cogitated a little, smoking; then said:—"Can't help thinking your venerable granny had a finger in that pie. Don't I recollect something . . . something . . .? Oh yes, I remember! It was Anne Tucker who had something, I forget what, to do with the former opening of one of those boxes, and your grandmamma objected to their being opened again in her house because she conceived that they had been somehow contaminated by Anne Tucker's moral character. . . . Or wasn't it something about an insect? I forget! Anyhow, the old lady stood at bay when the proposal was made to bring the filthy things to her house. Consequently they were taken to the Square, and there it seems they are still." He tapped the ashes out of his pipe, keeping his eyes on them as though their past were something like

his own—so I fancy now; I saw nothing then—and said with a sigh:—“Oh dear, twenty-five years ago now—very nearly!”

I recall all I can recollect of incident connected with those boxes, as they played so large a part in my life till they and I wound up our connection with one another, rather abruptly.

Gracey told me something next day of the battle royal which we had interrupted that evening. Whether she told me everything I cannot say. I had at the time the impression that she kept something back.

Jemima—we usually called her so when alone—had said, speaking of me and Cooky:—“Fancy those two boys getting such a look over the dear old house!” On which Roberta had said, disagreeably:—“Are you so jealous of them, Helen? Are *you* so anxious to see the inside of the ‘dear old house’? I should have thought *you* would be glad to forget all about it.”

“I thought,” said Gracey, “that Jemima kept her temper very well. I mean ‘kept her temper’ because of the way Bert repeated her words ‘the dear old house.’ You know how nasty Bert can be, when she likes.”

“Rather!”

“Well, she liked. I’m sure Jemima wanted to be conciliatory. Only she did look very much shocked. I lost my temper with Bert.”

“She’s a beast. . . . Well, she’s aggravating! What did you say?”

“I flared up. I said ‘Why is Aunt Helen to be gladder to forget all about it than you or—us?’ I think I heard Bert say to Anderson:—‘She’s only a child!’ Meaning I wasn’t worth an answer. Why am I to be only a child? Because she’s married, I suppose.”

“You’re only two years younger than she is,” said I. I was trying to get outside family tradition, and see it as others saw it. Gracey seemed to me disproportionately more my age than Bert, who had enrolled herself among seniors, by marrying. But if she was a child I was two years more so, and resented the insult. “Didn’t her Anderson husband tell her she was a fool?”

“N—no! But I think he said I was going on for twenty. So I am, you know. It’s no use shutting one’s eyes.”

“I suppose it isn’t. But I don’t see what that has to do with the matter. What did Jemima say?”

“Poor Aunt Helen! She really looked very much upset, and I don’t wonder. Because I do really think, Jackey . . . . Oh no—

I daresay *you* don't! . . . that when she married Papa, she was thinking a great deal about us girls. I really do. And when Bert turned upon her in this way it was a great shock. It would have been, to anybody. Why, Bert and she were always . . . were always——”

“In each other's pockets?”

“I was going to say ‘like sisters’. Only——”

“Only Jemima's old enough to be Bert's mother! Well—she *is*! She's twenty years older. ‘Twenty does.’ This rather obscure saying meant that mothers of twenty were no rarity. “But what did Jemima *say*?”

“She said ‘Yes—dear Gracey is quite right. Why should I wish to forget Mecklenburg Square—any more than you do—any more than those boys?’ Then Bert said with a snap:—‘You know best,’ and stood looking savage at her. Aunt Helen said—keeping her temper wonderfully, I must say; I know I should have lost mine—‘I can't understand what you mean, Roberta. What on earth is it that makes you so furious with me always?’ And then she thought a little and said:—‘Don't you think it would really be better, my dear, if you were to speak out plainly and say what it's all about, instead of making mysteries?’ But Bert wouldn't answer, and made believe to read Tennyson, and I thought we might talk of something else. She hadn't done, though, for she looked up in a minute and said:—‘You know perfectly well that I *can't*.’ And when Aunt Helen said:—‘Can't what?’—and no wonder, for really it was so long before!—she said: ‘Can't speak out plainly. There! I won't talk any more about it,’ and pretended to read.”

“I say—what did she mean?” For I could not understand all this scrupulousness on Bert's part. Had she not denounced Jemima before this in good, round terms for presuming to marry my father. For that was the head and front of her offending.

“I think I know what she meant,” said Gracey, slowly. Then to Varnish, who was there, she said quickly:—“Don't you, Varnish?”

“I couldn't speak to her, knowing what she *meant*, Miss Gracey. But if she'd spoke it out, I lay I should have agreed with Miss Roberta.” I understood this to mean that any censure of my step-mother would probably have been endorsed by her. For Varnish had never forgiven the Cat, though she had for a long time given up applying that epithet to her.

"But I think I *do* know," said Gracey. "Only one doesn't like the sound of it in words. She meant that Jemima had thought over it all before we lost Mamma."

"Why, in course she had!" said Varnish, uncompromisingly. "Who was to stop her?" And then she did make use of that epithet. "A sly Cat, I say!"

"Oh, Varnish," said Gracey. "How hard you are!"

"I says what I think, Miss Gracey."

"Perhaps she never thought over it aloud?" I took this as a discrimination between the attitude of mind which hatches a plot frankly, and that which shrinks from the terms of its conception.

"'P'raps' never got upstairs, as the sayin' is," said Varnish. I do not, however, believe that Varnish had ever heard this saying, or that such a one exists. She seemed to wish to go out of the conversation, I thought, but not before she had given a colour to it. "I shan't say another word," said she. "Only just you make this young Squire tell you all through what the doctor gentleman said, outside of Dr. Hammond's in Bernard Street. All through!" And Varnish gave her whole soul to darning.

I did as she wished, repeating every word that Mr. Parminter Harris used, but I confess with some stuttering over his stupid use of the phrase "poisoning case". I had already told this to Varnish, in the morning; and though she did not comment, she checked off each item of my narrative as it came, with a nod, as in harmony with the version already given. Neither of them seemed so much offended as I had been at the way Mr. Harris had spoken. Dr. Scammony would correct that misapprehension. The portion of Mr. Harris's observation that seemed to interest them was his curiosity about my father's second marriage, and his rather impertinent way of saying he thought it was the governess.

"I recollect thinking him a cheeky man," said Gracey. However, we dismissed him as Cooky and I had done, and I asked Gracey whether there was any more row after that, and she said heaps. In the course of which it appeared that Jemima had lost her temper, and cried and got "rather wild," at which Gracey didn't wonder. And then we had come in, and that stopped it. "But I really shouldn't be much surprised," said she, "if Bert and Anderson never come here again. I really shouldn't." To which Varnish replied:—"Lard sakes, Miss Gracey, it's never as



bad as all that." Then Gracey said:—"I don't think it matters, you know. I don't think anything matters. It seems as if the old time was all going away, and we could keep none of it."

I recollect a kind of surprise at Varnish saying:—"Now you're not to fret, Miss Gracey. He'll come back a General, Master Monty will, and he's not the sort that forgets old friends." It seemed such a sudden jump from the sins of Jemima and the unforgiveness of Bert. But I understand it all now.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

THE Retreat was sadder than it was ready to admit when the day came for Ensign Moss's last farewell to it. But it was pleased to make believe that nothing particular was going to happen.

The only person who referred to it was Thomas the coachman—he occurs, I know, some distance back in this narrative—who addressed me from his box as I waited at the gate for my father in the morning. I used to get the advantage of a lift to town in the brougham occasionally, when times and seasons suited. I need not say that Thomas touched his hat before adventuring into the wilds of human speech.

“Miss Raynes in the kitchen was makin' mention, last evening, that Mr. Montague was sailing by the boat, to-morrow morning, for India.”

“She's about right. He's gone into the Army, you see!” I was rather proud of having a friend who had gone into the Army.

“I always did think Mr. Montague had the look. There's a many you can tell off-hand wouldn't make a soldier. There's the reverend gentleman, Miss Raynes was a-saying, he's a lot best out of the Army.”

“Him! He's only a parson.” I think now that perfect justice might have admitted that my clerical brother-in-law-elect had never aspired to knighthood or soldiership. He was a person of staggering meekness, with a slight stoop, and delicate white hands.

Thomas assented, mesmerizing his horse thoughtfully with his whip lash, and keeping his eyes on its ears. “Only I should not have said India was a good climate. Parties I've heard tell of have died of it. And they're having a bad time out there now, so they say. Howsomever, we may count on that job being done by the time Mr. Montague gets out.” He discoursed on affairs military, taking a view like that of the father in Jabberwocky, that the avoidance of danger was a soldier's first object to consider. He was to heed well jubbub birds, and shun frumious bandersnatches.

I expressed my conviction that Cooky would exercise every dis-

cretion, but would somehow distinguish himself; and, meeting with rapid promotion, would shortly become a General of Division.

Just then my father came out, looking at his watch, and we had to hurry away. "Who's going to be a General?" said he, having caught the last words of our conversation. "Oh, ah—Nebuchadnezzar, I suppose! By the by, isn't he coming tonight to give us his blessing?" I said that by the by he was affecting a manly superiority to human emotion. We conversed about his departure on the same lines, and the only concession we made to the seriousness of the position was that we so very much overdid our certainty that this row in India would all be over before he got there. I even made use of the expression that he would be too late for any of the fun. My father's only censure of this rather boyish speech was to say drily:—"Queer fun, some of it!" We were really making believe. I have detected the same attitude of mind since then, in much civilian conversation about military operations. I believe it expresses somehow the readiness of manhood to serve in the army if called upon; an inherent fitness for so doing being common to all Englishmen. This tone can be indulged in with perfect security in a country where military service is not compulsory.

Our demeanour that evening, when we were waiting to hear our guest's knock, would have done credit to Sparta. An atmosphere of agreement that no one was on any account to commiserate anybody enveloped us. Why father, I think, just overdid the necessary amount of cheerfulness, being a poor actor. *Jemima* maintained an absolute equilibrium. But it may have included a pretence that she was not relieved.

Gracey was silent and white. As is not unusual with me, whatever *Ellen* was, I cannot recollect it. There are, however, so many things about that evening I cannot bring back. I cannot for instance remember how or when *Cooky* arrived, only that we waited for him. And what followed is a blank, until, as the female portion of the party at dinner abdicates, Gracey says to *Cooky*:—"Don't be longer than you need, you know!" and then that my mind receives the idea that it is a pity that my friend and my sister may not possess this hour to themselves—this hour that may be their last! For, suppose a stray Sepoy bullet finds its way to the heart of the man, will it not find the girl's heart, too?

But we have to do justice to a pretence, or—should I say!—to two pretences; one, that he is sure to come back alive in due course; another, that the interest of each one of us in his return only differs by *more* and *less*; that of the two most affected, Gracey

and myself, being precisely the same in every particular. On no account is concession to be made to the girlhood of Gracey and the manhood of the young soldier. That would never do; it would be allowing the marriage loom to weave its golden thread into the correct long-cloth of friendship. Quite out of the question, in this case!

Ideas that last a lifetime sometimes date from a particular moment. I think it was just when Gracey said:—"Don't be longer than you need, you know!" and I saw her face, that the idea was borne in upon me that when the human race allows its dark and foolish faddles about the Unknown, which I can see no reason to suppose is not the Unknowable, to sway the ordering of its lives, it is only surrendering without a protest to its collective egotisms, and cowering at the feet of an insensate graven image—a nightmare indigestion of the sleep of Ignorance. I am sure that I have held since then a sincere conviction of the wickedness of intruding on the lives of others our guidance—or coercion masquerading as guidance—based on thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls. I have never found that this conviction has quarrelled with another equally strong, that there is no more creditable motive for personal conduct than the one which impels us to fall in with the general scheme of Creation. Those who choose to phrase this as obedience to the Will of God may do so, for anything I care. Provided always that they do not forthwith proceed to interpret the Will of God, and impose their interpretation on slaves they own, or dupes they make.

I suppose the world never to have been more savagely scourged than by the religious conviction of kindled egotism that its sincerity confers the right of dictating the lives of others. I remember now that Cooky once expressed admiration for Torquemada, for his obvious honesty and his deep sense of duty. Was not his logic inexorable? Here were Jews galore, all damned, axiomatically. If roasted now, the undamned inheritance would be at its minimum; there would, in fact, be one damned soul in Hell, in place of the prospect of an indefinite number. And was not the worthy Cardinal just as convinced of hellfire for Jews as the earth-measurer of old was that two straight fences would not enclose a field? And Euclid is true, anyhow! Come now! Therefore, said Cooky, this conscientious Inquisitor was only striving to correct an oversight of Omniscience, and to limit its consequences as much as possible.

I was quite ready with a tribute to the single-mindedness of the Holy Office, and of deep religious conviction generally. But

I looked at the matter from the point of view of the personal inconvenience it occasions its victims. Why torture Jews and Heretics to death, for anything short of a certainty? Even Euclid, strong as his conviction must have been that two straight lines cannot enclose a space, try how they may, never would have given way to the temptation to burn a fellow-creature who denied that the squares on the sides of a right-angled triangle are together equal to the square on its base. Then, to be sure, Euclid never had a Divine Revelation of the truth of Axiom 10. He may even have had misgivings about the flatness of the ear. No doubt, however, an equivalent existed in Greek for the useful adverb *practically*. He would have consoled himself with the reflection that this planet is "practically" flat. How the two straight lines would have crowed, if each could have produced itself all round the world, with a double intersection, to be able to "point out," to Euclid, that they had actually gone one better than his challenge, and enclosed him two whole spaces instead of one, as stipulated!

Would Euclid have sanctioned a marriage of his son into a family that affirmed the rotundity of the earth? Probably, because it wouldn't have been Religion. Cooky's old mother, whose heart he shrank from breaking by asking her to accept a Gentile daughter-in-law, was more certain that her people were the Chosen of the Lord than Euclid was about those two straight lines—far more certain, because it was Revelation. So overwhelming is the force of tradition, so unassailable are instructions delivered personally by the Creator of the Universe—the longer ago the better—that both retained their influence over a mind that rejected them on their merits—my friend's mind. It had done this, I am convinced; but the dark cloud of an ancestral belief, combined with affection for his mother to warp his natural instincts, and drive him to a desperate expedient to escape from a position whose embarrassments must needs grow worse as time went on. That way madness lay.

This is all retrospect, it shows the position as I see it now. In what I have written hitherto I have tried to recall only what seemed real to me then. Probably any one reading it—only no such perusal will ever take place—would receive the impressions I had myself, which indeed had a most unsubstantial character up to the very moment of Cooky's farewell. Let me get back of it, and recall all I can. It *may* shake my faith in my own later inferences, but I doubt it.

I do remember, as I have said, that a nascent indignation against the obsession of Life by Creed stirred in my mind when Gracey



hinted that, in view of the circumstances, Cooky and I might transpire in the drawing-room at the earliest moment usage would warrant. It was something in Gracey's look that started it, and it had come to stay; but with very little luggage, so far.

"Don't consider yourselves bound to stop here, you two boys!" said my father, who was probably alive to what was going on. I looked at Cooky, and he at me; and each look said to the other:—"Suppose we make it five minutes!" It would have been too brutal to take immediate advantage of my father's suggestion. We disclaimed hurry, verbally, and made some parade of the unusually normal character of the occasion. My father persisted in recognizing its exceptional feature, recurring to it candidly. "And if the regiment remains in India, how long will it be before we can come back on leave?" said he, meaning by "we," of course, Cooky. Who replied, I think, three years. "Very well then, Nebuchadnezzar, we shall be on the lookout for you in three years' time." We might have believed the Ninth Lancers invulnerable to powder and shot, for any hint that was given of his never coming back at all.

We made it five minutes, filled out with talk of this kind. I suppose we were all aware how hollow the conversation was, and that it was only maintained—like so much conversation—to keep in abeyance the gist of what it professed to deal with. I doubt if it had reached the end of the short existence we had allotted to it, when my father cut it shorter still, saying, "Now, suppose you go!" and we looked at each other, and got up uneasily. He softened our departure by adding:—"It's not good-bye. I shall see you again presently."

The gas in the entrance hall was flaring, and I stopped to adjust it, letting Cooky precede me into the drawing-room. When I followed, I was exasperated to find that Ellen's parson had managed to get in, unheard by us in the library, and was shaking hands with Cooky, with a subacute benediction in his manner. He could forgive Calvary, in Society. I hope I did not touch his meek conciliatory hand too abruptly. I doubt if I succeeded in concealing the feeling which manifested itself as unalloyed relief ten minutes later, when Gracey said to me privately:—"Get Monty into the dining-room, and I'll come." I welcomed the suggestion, and in spite of a sudden violent solicitude of my step-mother lest the fire should have gone out in the proposed haven, succeeded in forsaking the Rev. Irenæus, who pretended to be sorry, and wasn't.

"I shall catch it from Aunt Helen tomorrow," said Gracey.

following us very shortly after. "But I don't care. I must have Monty the rest of the time. Oh dear, it's such a little time now!" Cooky said nothing, but kept looking at the fire, which hadn't gone out. Then Gracey made an effort, and cheered up. "Never mind!" said she. "We can be the Club for more than a hour yet. Let's be the Club!" So we made up the fire, and were resolute to forget the shadow of the coming parting. I felt the strain on my courage; but, as I see now, was strangely blind to the much greater stress that was—must have been—felt by both my companions.

I think they found it a relief to make believe that *I* was the principal sufferer. "Poor Jackey!" said Gracey. "Whatever he will do without you to look after him and keep him in order, I can't imagine."

"Poor little Buttons," said Cooky, commiseratingly. "He'll have to scrat on." He changed his tone to reassurance. "Oh—he's going to set the Thames on fire. I shall expect him to have a picture on the line at the Academy by the time I come back. . . . Well—three years is time enough for that. I shall turn up again in three years, you'll see! I shall be a lieutenant."

"Lieutenant Moss. So you will!" said Gracey. "And Nelly will be . . . Let's talk of how it will be. I like to——"

I interposed an impromptu forecast of Ellen's future. "Ellen will be a she-Parson, in the Isle of Man. With fifty little Parsons, always tumbling off the Isle of Man into the water." I don't think I should have ventured on this phase of possibility, if it had not been sanctioned, as it were, by Ecclesiastical association.

Cooky rounded off and softened my indiscretion for me. "They always *do* have large families," said he, "but——"

I said:—"Well—not fifty perhaps; but lots, anyhow! And Jemima will be losing her looks."

Gracey objected. "That's spiteful, Jackey! Fancy Aunt Helen! She won't lose her looks for another ten years, if she does then. Isn't she a wonderful woman for forty-four, Monty?"

"You don't mean to say she's that! I thought she was thirty-nine."

"So she was, once. But do you remember where that was? That was just when we came from the Square, outside in the garden. She hasn't kept thirty-nine." This was harking back on the early days. These ways of putting things were understood by the Club.

Thinking over it now, it seems to me that Cooky must have

flinched from memories of the past. That would account for the strain that seems to come on the face that I fifty years later recall as his at that moment. It seems to shake off something with an effort, as he says:—"Your Governor will have chucked the Office by then, little Buttons, and taken his pension."

"And Bert? How about Bert?" said Gracey.

"Bother Bert!" said I. "*She* doesn't matter."

"Well—*me* then!" said Gracey. "*I* matter."

"Rather!" said Monty. "Only it's prophesying!"

"Not more for me than for Papa or Aunt Helen or Jackey. Now prophesy, Monty! Don't be frightened. Be a gipsy. You look rather like one, you know!"

Cooky gave an uneasy laugh. His answer was an escape from a difficulty through an exaggeration. "You'll have married a Duke," said he.

"*Shall I?*" said Gracey. Neither of them looked at the other—both at the fire. I remember wondering why she, so pale a moment since, should flush red. Surely that was not the fire-light? She went on after a pause of silence:—"No—Monty! The Duke will have to wait till you come home. Do you think I could marry a Duke, or anybody, without first knowing what you thought of him?"

I have a theory about the meaning of this speech, formed since. It meant:—"We may not love—we cannot marry. Cold friendship is our starvation allowance, but our souls are our own, and mine is yours." This was too much then for my boyish capacity, and I took all they said for joking—a kind of joking.

I wonder that Cooky's pale set face, as he looked up from the fire, had no meaning for me. "It would be no use consulting me. It wouldn't be fair to the Duke. Give the poor beggar a chance." So he said, and I failed to see that the thin veil of mockery in his words and hers was only a working pretext for a hint at the truth. How each longed to say:—"I love you, but we must part, before the stupefying necessity of a world-old superstition." And yet—which of them could speak the word first. Not the girl, certainly. And how could the man say to her:—"I fear my love for you, and must fly from it, as I cannot face my own world and its usage of centuries?" For, dwelling on the question later, I certainly have suspected Cooky of a sort of cowardice—his only cowardice—and I cannot think he was much influenced by official ignorance of Gracey's feelings towards him. It was, no doubt, correct to say to himself that possibly she looked on him as an object of unqualified and flavourless friendship, but

I suspect the perfunctory recitation of this formula had very little weight with him.

I believe that that fictitious Duke was made the stalking-horse—if one may put it so—of a compact between them. In the conversation that followed, at that last meeting of the Club, I remember his saying, in the same half-jesting way:—"Now mind you write and tell me when the Duke turns up." Whereunto Gracey replied, with every appearance of meaning what she said:—"Yes—I can make *that* promise." Then the conversation went off sillily to some joke about the Duke's being his Grace, and her being his Gracey. When, many, many years after that, I found the letters Cooky wrote from India, in a drawer where she had put them with other old mementoes, I read in them his inquiries about this Duke, and knew what they meant.

If I had had more tact, I think I should have left them alone. What harm could it have done, to give them that last hour to themselves? The die was cast, for him. He could not go back on his undertaking to join his regiment. And that necessity would have been equally binding on her to say good-bye to him. So I might just as well have had now the satisfaction of thinking that the shortness of their last interview was not due to my boyish stupidity. I was, however, not destined to be *de trop* through the whole of it.

For after half-an-hour's conversation, weighed always with their superfluous semi-jocularity, I thought I heard Varnish afar, inquiring for Master Jackey. "Suppose you go and see what she wants, little Buttons!" said Cooky.

I went, and found Varnish on the landing, who threw open the door of her private den so conclusively, that I walked in. "I was just upon putting out my light, Master Jackey," said she. "Because Raynes, she's gone down to the kitchen. So just you come along in, and tell me! Where's your pa?"

"Finished his pipe and gone into the drawing-room. I heard them all jawing, just now. The Archbishop sneaked in somehow, while we were in the library, and he's there now, looking like a fool."

"Where's Miss Ellen?" said Varnish.

"Sitting on the Archbishop's knee," said I, boldly.

"Get along with you, Master Jackey! Both of them know better than to. And the family all there—looking and seeing!"

"There was only Jemima, when I came out. *She's* nobody."

"She don't think so herself, I lay. But where are Mr. Monty and Miss Gracey then?"

"In the dining-room. There's a fire. We all three hooked it out of the drawing-room to talk. Cooky's not coming again—you know? At least not till he's back from India." The only reason why I was so positive of his return, was that any other issue was altogether too bad to entertain, or at least to recognize officially.

A satisfied look came on Varnish's face. "There now, Master Jackey," she said, "just you leave them be. They can do without you for a bit."

"Oh yes—*they're* all right." I felt that I could safely reassure Varnish. "They're not much in the dumps, either of them. You see, he'll be six weeks on the road, and by the time he gets there all this row will be over. I'm not in a funk about Cooky." I believe that in saying this I conceived that I was offering manly assurance to female timidity—soothing the panic of an alarmist. I don't suppose that Varnish took the slightest notice of my well-intentioned efforts in the interest of her nervous system.

"Miss Gracey and Master Monty," said she, "they're very old friends by now."

"Rather!" said I. "Why—I was a small kid at school that time Cooky came home with me, and the Governor christened him Nebuchadnezzar. Cooky said Nebuchadnezzar wasn't really King of the Jews, only it didn't matter." I did not further revive the controversy that took place at the time, because the authority for the Kingship of the Assyrian monarch over Judah and Israel occurs only in a poem the censorship should have suppressed. I continued:—"Oh yes—awfully old friends! Gracey doesn't half like his going. But that's only because she thinks he may get killed."

"Miss Gracey and Master Monty," said Varnish, looking at me with a curious attentive look, "won't be in any hurry to forget one another." She waited, to hear my answer.

It came, decisively if not lucidly. "Who wants them to?"

"Ah—you may say who, Master Jackey!"

"Well—*who*, then? The Governor doesn't. Sure he doesn't!"

"He's *one*, doesn't. And Miss Ellen, she's another—p'rhaps!"

"Oh—Ellen doesn't count. You mean Jemima."

"Well, Master Jackey, suppose I do?"

I reflected. "She oughtn't to count. She isn't in it. How does she make out it's any concern of hers?"

Varnish was unfavourable to consecutive reasonings, analytical processes, discrimination of cause and effect. She preferred her



own unsullied conclusions, arrived at without data, or fuss of any sort. "She don't want Master Monty back again, your step-mar don't," said she, decisively.

"Not if he marries a she-Jew?" said I.

"Not anyhow. Now, Master Jackey, you bear in mind the expression I called Miss Evans when I could take the liberty of speaking. You remember that expression?"

"Cat!" said I, uncompromisingly. "Sly cat!"

"Sh—sh, Master Jackey! Whatever it was, I called it her then, but you never hear me call her nothing now."

"Why not? *I* don't care."

"Any lady your papa marries, Master Jackey, I could wish to speak well of. And calling Cat is not respectful, say it who may. So I say nothing, now. But she don't want Master Monty back again, for all that, and she has her reasons. But it's not for me to say anything."

Varnish was ascribing to Jemima no reason for wishing to get rid of Monty except that she thought further development of his attachment to Gracey undesirable; or, if so, she said nothing explicit about it to me. I for my part took her enigmatical manner to be warranted by the reluctance I was then beginning to notice, and have noticed a good deal since, to say nothing whatever, plainly, about a love-affair. It is made up for, to some extent, by a great alacrity in waggery, a ready supply of nods and winks and lip-telegraphy short of whispers, an instantaneous reciprocal understanding that puts bystanders at a loss. All this may be supplemented by archness. But did any one ever say pointblank:—"John loves Jenny, and Jenny loves John, and they want to get married." Oh dear, no!—he always says he suspected something there—has done so for a long time. And he and his accomplice in tattle seem mightily amused at this something!

No doubt Varnish thought me just too young to be alive to the seriousness of that mystery, Love. It was no accepted convention as to its treatment that made her speech obscure; but as I suppose, a wish to suggest something to my unreceptive mind to help it to a complete understanding of the situation. I had shown a feeble receptivity in that surmise that a change would come about if Cooky found a mate among his own people, and Varnish was ready with a handful of seed for the ground half-tilled.

Nevertheless, unless my memory is at fault, her manner was odd. I am ready, however, to suppose that my recollection of it

colours, or discolours, what she seems to me now to have said at the end of this short interview, before I rejoined Gracey and Monty downstairs.

For she seems to me, after repeating a second time that it's not for her to say anything, to continue thus:—"Anyways, I know what Miss Roberta would say, speaking her free mind like she does, and can, being at Roehampton." This local reference was not what puzzled me, being nothing but a daring omission of explanation. It was what followed:—"What now was the name of the doctor you saw? Dr. Partner Harris?"

"Mr. Parminter Harris, with a plaid scarf and giglamps. But he's Dr. Scammony's partner." This was to extenuate Varnish's misreading of the name.

She nodded an assent to some thought of her own, and said, quite or nearly inexplicably:—"And Master Monty living in Doughty Street, close handy. That's what Miss Roberta would say, anyhow!"

"You mean," said I, fishing for illumination, "what he said about Jemima being the governess?"

"That's the bit you heard," was the reply. And my powers of recollection serve me no further. We certainly talked a minute or so longer, making a foundation for a superstructure I built afterwards, to the effect that Jemima would welcome any dissociation from such as had known her at the Square, and also *their* dissociation, so far as it was possible, from one another. Or at least that my married sister, "Miss Roberta," would say so; that being, as it were, Varnish's stalking-horse from which to promulgate this view of the subject. She reined it up suddenly to say to me:—"I lay it's time for you to be going back. Squire!" I thought it might be, for anything I knew to the contrary, and went.

I stopped earnest conversation in the dining-room; and, strange as it seems to me now, did not see why I should not do so. They had had their innings, according to my ideas. And here was Cooky, going away for good, in less than an hour's time! I was beginning to be awake to the uncomfortable reality of parting.

They were not close together, and I think I understand that now, when I look back and see what their relation really was at that moment. She—so afterthought on the matter tells me—had been, for longer than he knew, the ruling force of his life, although the correctitudes of nationality and creed had forbidden him to think her so. He had been the same to her, but more safeguardedly, under the reserves every girl has to make to-

wards any man who has not laid his heart open to her. Her course of conduct had only been the one hundreds of women have to put in practice; indeed, my own suspicion is that most women's experience teaches them at least sympathy with those who have to practise it. He had presumed a little—or had he not?—on the claim the superior creature Man makes to priority of action, which it has pleased him to determine is a fundamental essential of human nature. Poor Cooky! If he had done so he had been over-confident of his own self-mastery. And now the terrible moment had come, when all his fortitude was to be put to the test. I can see now plainly why he dared not go too near the lips he was not to kiss. But courage!—if he could counterfeit friendship for another hour, it would be all over, and it would be open to both to make believe that they had kept their hearts bolted and barred against Love.

The two earnest voices died down as I came down into the room, and the only words I caught were, "Well—we shall see," from Gracey. I asked her afterwards what they had been talking of when I came in, and she said, "Oh—nothing!" and she had forgotten.

As I remember, we sat silent, or said very little. It was the first and only time the Club had found itself tongue-tied. Cooky might have been stone, so still was his face and so white, as he stood with his elbow against the mantelshelf, his free hand making some pretence of using the poker to economize a coal which had to maintain the character of the fire, doomed to short life by an empty scuttle. I was fool enough to be glad to note that Gracey's large blue eyes were free of tears, to which I had at that time of my life an amazingly strong objection. But I was not clever enough to understand why her lips moved so uneasily, nor why her fingers interlaced and caught, convulsively. I know now, and know what she felt, and why.

I thought, in the silence, I had never heard the black marble clock on the mantelpiece tick so loud. Indeed, as a matter of fact, I had never noticed that this clock did tick, though I had known it from babyhood. I had accepted it as a fact, that would tell the time, and that went. Some one else always wound it up, in the nature of things; but, as for its tick, it was always there, and had gone on steadily—in vain as far as I was concerned. I felt now as if it had become vociferous, and was shouting that it was a quarter-to-eleven, our official day's end. And I was not grateful.

Cooky looked suddenly at his watch, and broke the silence. "I tell you what," said he, "I shall go into the drawing-room

again, and get my good-bying done, and then come back here." This postponed the evil climax, if only a few minutes, and was welcome.

"What were you and Varnish talking about upstairs, Jackey?" said Gracey, when Cooky had left the room.

I had to stop a moment to consider what Varnish really had been saying, so enigmatical had her share of the conversation been. I decided on, "Pitching into Jemima," as a good, safe, general inference. Then I qualified it:—"Or, at least, saying what Bert would say, only she means she agrees."

"What did she say Bert would say?"

It was one of my misfortunes, in youth, that I never could stand cross-examination. I was sorry I had said so much, and tried to back out. "Oh—well—she doesn't really mean it, you know."

"But what doesn't she really mean? Don't bottle up, Jackey darling! Tell me right out."

Then I saw how really anxious Gracey was to know. And how could I have any secrets from Gracey? "She's got hold of an idea," said I, "that Jemima isn't sorry Cooky's going."

"But *why*?"

I felt my difficulties. I had to manage confession, somehow, without direct reference to the thing I had to confess. I was not prepared to admit that any *tendresse*, or anything beyond cordial friendship, had been ascribed to my friend and my sister. But I was beginning to feel the nature of the position. I answered:—"I suppose it's because Cooky's a Jew."

Gracey seemed to accept this as an unfinished speech, waiting as though to hear more. Then she said interrogatively:—"That . . . ?" as though asking me to complete my sentence.

"That what?" said I.

"That he ought to go and get killed in India? . . . Monty ought—?"

"N—no! That Jemima doesn't cotton to him."

But Gracey was not to be put off with a makeshift. "Why doesn't Aunt Helen cotton to Monty because he's a Jew?" said she. That meant, why did Jemima allow herself to be influenced by racial and religious considerations in a case where the personality of their subject cancelled them at sight? Indeed, I had heard her admit, in controversy with Gracey, the extreme improbability of Cooky taking part in orgies wherein the blood of young Christians was decanted for unholy purposes, whatever the practice of St. Mary Axe and Palestine might be.

I was hiding one aspect of the case from Gracey, and I knew

it. And yet, why should there be secrets between us. This was contrary to nature, surely. I bethought me of an indirect way of grappling with the subject, which had served me well before. "I don't expect," said I, "that Jemima would be so fierce about it if Cooky was engaged to be married to a she-Jew."

Then I saw how that restless working of her fingers grew, and heard the tremor in her voice as she said:—"Oh, Jackey, do you mean that Monty is going to India to be killed because of me?"

I said:—"That's not the way to put it. Cooky's going to India because he wants to be a soldier. Perhaps if he was engaged to Miss Solomons, Jemima wouldn't be glad he was going. That's about all. It's only Jemima."

"Jackey darling, be a good boy and talk seriously. Look now! It isn't as if Monty and I didn't both know. We know we *can't*. I see we can't. You see we can't?"

"Oh, I understand quite well. Because of this beastly Christianity——" I was stopped by the want of the word Judaism, not one familiar to my lips, and had to find a substitute. I added, after a pause:—"And Jewification."

Gracey was not Ellen, and tolerated my language, taking no notice of it. "That's right. That's how it is. But we can't help it. We can't alter things. What must be, must. But why must we lose Monty because we cannot be . . . because of . . . because of *that*?" I noticed—or my memory notices now—that an excruciation came in her voice whenever it flinched from speech about Love or Marriage. Also I think now that she found it easier always to speak of our joint affection for Monty than of her own alone. Mine was sponsor for hers, and all that I felt at his departure she had an unquestioned right to feel.

I think I half-understood this then; for, after attempting, transparently enough, to revive an ungrounded confidence in the early extinction of the Mutiny, and the security in the near future of the Ninth Lancers, I ventured on an unwarranted forecast:—"I say, Gracey, how do we know they won't have put a stopper on all that rot by the time he's back? It may be three years, you know!" I don't know who were the "they" I was referring to. But I was giving them short allowance of Time, considering the strength of the convictions they would have had to surrender.

"Silly Jackey!" said Gracey. And then, hearing the drawing-room door open and close, we let the subject drop, for Cooky was coming. The moment was at hand—terribly near now! I



could see how ashy white both my companions were, and could feel how their hearts beat, as indeed mine began to do, too. For I was getting to a fuller understanding of their position rapidly.

"Is the Governor coming out?" said I, to break the silence, which was oppressive; all the more so that Cooky came into the room almost as one enters a sick chamber, closing the door gently.

"I think not," said he, and his voice was husky. "I didn't ask him not to, but I fancy he won't." Then he made an effort to speak more unconcernedly, and seemed to find a relief in a subject with a smile in it. "The Archbishop is just gathering up to tear himself away. He knows he mustn't stop after eleven." I helped with a rather perfunctory laugh.

Gracey ignored the Archbishop, without a smile. "When shall we get our first letter?" said she.

He made a great effort to pull himself together. "I shall have a long letter ready, in case we put in at Madeira," said he, and his would-be cheerful tone was as bad as any depression. "Anyhow, I shall send a line from Southampton. They say the weather's going to be good. Of course, it will be a bit rough in the Bay. It always is. But it won't hurt me. The sea doesn't. Some of our officers are going overland to Suez. I don't envy them—I would sooner go the long way. Only they will have forgotten all about the Mutiny by the time we get there."

"I hope they will," said Gracey. But she made no response to his attempt at cheerfulness, and it would have been useless, with that white face and that tremor on her lips. He stuck bravely to the task he had assigned himself, the playing out his part to the end, and chatted on about how, when he came back, it might be through the new canal, which at this time was discredited in England as rather a canal in the clouds, so that his reference to it was scarcely serious. But it did not help him much; his pleasantry over it was too mechanical. I was not sorry when Gracey said:—"Hush, don't talk! There's the Archbishop going. They'll hear us." Whereupon we were silent, and sounds of dispersal and departure followed, ending up with some bed-room candlestick finalities in the lobby, and a retreat to roost, complicated with the appearance of the household, or some of it, to shut up. Then silence without, and Cooky saying huskily, through a long-drawn breath:—"Well—I shall have to go in the end. Better make it *now*, and get done with it!"

What follows is strong in my memory. As Cooky takes his farewell clasp of my hand, his lies on my shoulder. "Good-bye, dear little chap," he says, speaking to me always as though I were still the very small schoolboy in need of protection. I am aware that Gracey's side-face, as she turned away, has a bitten underlip; but I am thankful to feel that she will not break down. Indeed, my great anxiety is that we may all comport ourselves immovably, like Hurons or Iroquois. My own belief is that many male cubs share this mental attitude. Emotion is the one thing to avoid.

I am further relieved when Cooky says Amen to our particular farewell, utilizing—as I now conjecture—a slight noise in the passage to terminate it. "See if that isn't your Governor, not gone to bed," he says. I go, to see.

The noise was my Governor, pausing doubtfully, with a bedroom candle near the stairfoot. "I hear the Knight Errant hasn't gone," says he. "I mean Nebuchadnezzar."

"Oh no—Cooky's there, all right enough. He'll be going directly."

"Yes—go in here," says he, pushing the library door. I have made no suggestion to that effect, but I accept his. "I told Raynes not to wait up to lock up," he says, and I perceive his compressed meaning. He keeps the door ajar as he stands there listening for the final farewells in the room opposite. He may have heard more than I, for he says:—"I thought so," to himself, although my hearing it was immaterial.

I can hear no more than that the two voices are strained, and that there are tears in Gracey's. Then, at last, that he is going, and the door is opened, making words here and there audible. For all that their tension is so palpable, I can distinguish this—that up to this moment neither has played ill the part conventions have dictated. They are two friends, look you, still! No more than that—two friends whose journey is along roads apart, for awhile yet, but who will meet again when the roads meet, three days hence; or weeks, or years, as may be. And from their voices in the passage I can tell that each is bravely struggling to play out this part to the last. They are almost making a parade of their farewell, being but as other farewells—an unusually normal one even!

I wanted to follow them, or at least to be in time to catch Cooky and walk with him so far as he went afoot, for I clung to the last moment. But my father said, "No—stop!" and remained, listening. Presently he said:—"I said good-bye to

Nebuchadnezzar. But the Father of the Church was there, and we didn't exactly have it to ourselves. Just you peep out, and report progress. When they're done, I'll come out and say good-bye again."

I stole out cautiously towards the front door, hearing as I went the words "Good-bye" from her, in a breaking voice, and from him "Yes—now good-bye," very huskily spoken. But his speech ended in an audible gasp, and there came a cry from her:—"Oh, Monty, Monty, we shall never see each other again!" Their resolution had broken down, just at the last moment.

To find whether I might legitimately join them, to stop his running away without me, and also to say that the Governor was just coming out, I looked furtively round the corner of the door. It was no surprise to me that they should be fast locked in each other's arms. The other way round would have been the surprise—to hear a cold good-bye of any sort, a mere conventional valediction! What is strange to me now is that I remember so distinctly a feeling of grievance that my manhood and Cooky's stood in the way of my hugging my farewell into him also. Think of what he had been to me for so many years!

It may be that the words I overheard then did more to show me what I had not understood before, than anything that preceded them. "Dearest—forgive me—I could not help myself! Oh, I must go—I *must* go—I *have* to go!" My impression is that Gracey said:—"Dear Monty, forgive you kissing me! Oh, why not?" But as he repeated, with a voice that caught, "I *must* go," I, fearing that he might go without seeing me, called out to stop him, saying he should wait to say good-bye to the Governor. He would not wait, and Gracey came in and passed me quickly, stopping a second to put up her cheek to her father, who only said, as he kissed it:—"Poor child, good-night."

"I'll catch Cooky and walk a little way with him," said I, hurrying into my great coat. My father said:—"Well—take the door-key." And then, as this involved some lock adjustment and delay:—"Never mind—trot away! I shan't be going to bed just yet. Only don't be too long." So I got away as quick as I could. But I did not catch Cooky, and his first letter told us he had jumped into a hansom just outside the gate into King's Road; so it was little wonder.

I think I ran as far as the ironmonger's expecting to overtake him, but only overtaking the previous omnibus and seeing he was not in it. I went back and found my father finishing a letter, and we locked up and said good-night on the landing. I did not

catch what he said to my stepmother, who said something to him as he entered his room. But I am pretty sure her reply was:—"Oh, my dear, what nonsense! Girls *must* sometimes, whether they like it or no. Why—it would have been simply *awful!*" I could imagine a context, but I see no object in doing so.

Whether I heard Gracey crying in her room as I passed the door, or only thought she *must* be crying, I do not know. Fifty years is a long time, and I often doubt if what I seem to remember so well is not a mere fetch of Memory—an effort to assuage the hunger of Oblivion.

I know the news came in the Spring—the news of his death, I mean. I am all at fault now about the story of it—the phase of the Mutiny that was active at the time. If I had to guide any historian to accuracy of place and hour, there is nothing I could swear to except that it occurred very shortly after the death of Havelock. But then I am equally certain that Cooky was killed in the attack on Cawnpore. And had not Havelock taken Cawnpore in the Summer, so that we had the news of it shortly before Cooky sailed in the Autumn? I have got the whole thing inextricably muddled. But, after all, what does it matter?

I only remember the coming of the news. It came the day after Ellen's wedding. I have reason to believe that my father connived at the shortness of his eldest daughter's engagement, in order that he might be released the earlier from the respectful visits of the Archbishop, who came up from the remote Isle of Man not less than three times. Of course he came every day to the shrine of his Goddess; puzzling me extremely, for—said I to myself—what he wants so much of Ellen for I can't imagine! I have seen couples both of the constituents of which have appeared to me repugnant to human nature, and have marvelled why they have not been so to one another. Without saying so much of this pair, I certainly felt impressed with the Wisdom of Providence, which had presumably incited their mutual flame, as a setoff against the indifference of the remainder of mankind to both. Anyhow, wedded they were, at St. Luke's Chelsea, and got rid of in a shower of three-pennyworth of rice and one old slipper. After which, a survival of wedding guests, dispersing gradually, disguised the fact that the remainder of the day had been destroyed for any useful purpose, at least so far as the bride's family were concerned. The said guests were better off, at least in so far as that they were able to shake free of a sort of spray of crumbs and cake, pulled crackers and sugar plums; to say nothing of two very young bridesmaids—one of whom ate too many macaroons



—whose nurse was bidden to come for them, but could not find the house to take them home as appointed. There were other afflictions, to wit, a respectable man who came out on jobs of the sort, and devoted himself to preventing the guests getting what they wanted, and which is what is called waiting; and a modern version—as I suppose—of Sneak's noise, which cited the Past as a justification of its unwelcome presence, but thought ten shillings too little, and got more.

However, Ellen's nuptials only occur to my mind because they fix a date. Next morning found the four survivors of the previous day mysteriously eager to see the announcement of the ceremony in *The Times*, each attempting to capture the advertisement-sheet when Raynes brought it in out of the wet into which a miscreant called The Boy had flung it over the garden gate. It seemed a consolation for yesterday's sufferings, but I don't know why. I feel certain that even my father shared this feeling; though, to do him justice, he concealed it. "I can't imagine," said he, "why you want to see the blessed advertisement. Aren't you convinced they are married?"

"I'm not, for one!" said Gracey. "One likes to see it in print, anyhow. Let me look, Aunt Helen, you've got all the paper." She ran through the text half-aloud, ending audibly:—"Ellen Wigram eldest daughter of Nathaniel Pascoe—that's you!—Esquire.' But you haven't put when she was born."

"My dear!" said my stepmother. "What nonsense you are talking! You're thinking of funerals." Gracey denied this, and affirmed that of course advertisements of weddings always gave the ages of the couple. But she retracted, after a short excursion among the other announcements, saying:—"Well—it was a mistake."

My father maintained a show of stoical indifference, but I noticed that when *The Times* was ultimately yielded to him, he glanced at the advertisement sheet *en passant* in folding it back so as to get at the latest intelligence. He could do this without prejudice to his self-respect, as the task of adjustment was complicated. Then he got at the leaders and the summary, and became absorbed.

"It's all very well to talk," said I, continuing the conversation the advent of *The Times* had interrupted. "But I saw Nankivell, with my own eyes, carry away a bottle of champagne two-thirds full, and bring in a full one that had just popped. And Varnish says Raynes says Thomas had to see him home. So there!" Nankivell was the respectable hireling, over whom Thomas, his



friend had endeavoured to draw a veil, saying he had never known him touch anything, or he would not have spoken for him. I think Thomas had better have stopped at that, and not tried to whitewash Mr. Nankivell further by saying it was his eyesight. Amblyopia does not cause inarticulate speech, nor ill-judged jocularity.

"One has to allow them a little latitude at weddings," said my stepmother, looking handsome, and eating nothing. She had had a bad night, as I understood. This habit of sleeping ill seemed to grow upon her, and my father worried over it a good deal, I am afraid. "We shan't have any more of them, that's one comfort!"

"Respectable men?" asked my father, showing consciousness of public affairs, although deep in Lord Palmerston and Mr. Disraeli.

"No! Weddings."

"I don't see how you can know *that*, Helen." I saw that my father was a little *froissé* by this classification of Gracey—for it amounted to that—both by his tone and by the way he felt for the outline of one of his cheekbones. "Have you been at Gracey's horoscope again?"

"*Dear Gracey!*" said Jemima then; as I thought, offensively. "I really quite forgot Gracey. Oh no!—we haven't been horoscoping, this time." And she made her speech still more offensive by patting Gracey's hand down on the tablecloth. Gracey was forgiveness itself—she always was—and not only left her hand in pawn, but said:—"Come, Aunt Helen, you know it didn't show at all yesterday in the Church, and nobody saw it. Varnish says they didn't."

I can't say that any one, before the wedding, had gone so far as to suggest that Gracey should abdicate as bridesmaid in favour of an undisfigured sample; but a flavour to that effect had got in the air, and had certainly touched my nostrils, and perhaps my father's. \*I waited for some expression of indignation from him, but none came, and then I saw that something in the newspaper had engrossed him, and that he had probably not caught Gracey's last words, which were the key to the inner meaning of the previous conversation. I myself was in a great hurry to get off to the Academy, and only noticed further that my father, when applied to for "some of" *The Times*, said:—"Yes—presently! You shall have it all directly." Which might quite well have meant nothing unusual, for our family tradition was that its head was not to surrender *The Times* one moment sooner than he chose,

however clamorous the demands for it might become. It was a law of Medes and Persians. I did, however, suspect something when he refused a second cup of coffee, and withdrew into his own room somewhat abruptly.

I had all but started when I heard him speak to my stepmother from his library, and her reply:—"Yes—I'll come in a minute or two." Then that he came to the door to say:—"No—come now! I have something to tell you." His voice meant that the something was a bad something, and the broken interchange of speech that followed on the closing of the door, that it was worse. I guessed that it was Indian news.

Gracey came halfway down the stairs from her bedroom—she had gone up to get ready to go out—and said:—"Is anything wrong? I thought I heard them talking." For voices would penetrate floors in some parts of the house.

I answered, uneasily and huskily enough, that some news had come. She became white, and looked very hard at me. "I know," said she. "It's Monty—hush!" She waited, listening to the voices in the library. "I wish they would come out and say at once, instead of talking."

The voices stopped, and my stepmother came out, cautiously. "Have you seen your sister? . . . Oh, here she is! . . . Both of you come in to your father. . . . Yes—he has found some news." She did not go back, but waited. Nor did I at once follow Gracey, who went in, without hesitation. She did not cry out when her father said to her—as she told me later; I could not hear what he said:—"I have some news from India, darling—bad news!" She said:—"Yes—go on!"

Then I too followed, in time to catch his words:—"He has been very badly wounded, at Cawnpore."

I did not see what Gracey saw at once, that this was only preparation for the truth. And indeed I still hoped she might be mistaken, when she turned to me and said:—"Oh, Poor Jackey! What will you do? Monty is dead!" My father said nothing.

How many years older did I grow in the minutes that followed. I do not know. But I know that I mustered manhood, then and there, to break down without disguise, and cry like a child. It was a step on towards maturity.

Looking back now, I still see my cubhood in this, that I scarcely thought of Gracey. I had, as it were, her sanction for a selfish surrender to my own grief; and I certainly took advantage of it. All my memories of my dear schoolboy friend—and one knows how dear school-friendship can be—came rushing through my mind

and knocking at my heart. Not only memories of himself, but of all things he had part in. I could see again that repellent wash-house at the school, and that incorrigible bully Nevinson, beaten to pulp and mad with entire defeat, trying to wash away the stains of the combat. I could smell the yellow soap and circular towels and hear the bleating of the unhappy washer's wrath. Then next day Cooky's voice, speaking to me for the first time, while his strong hand ruffles my head, as an expression of pure goodwill:—"Ain't you the little beggar he was sitting on? I like you. I think I shall call you Buttons." Then how I boasted of Cooky to Gracey, and she said:—"You must bring him home and show him to us." And how I resented the presumption that so great a creature could be brought home at pleasure. But he came, after asking was I sure my Governor would "stand it"; which my Governor did, and christened him Nebuchadnezzar.

And now the end of it all had come. I knew it by my father's silence when Gracey said:—"Monty is dead." And for the moment I was stunned into knowing no grief but my own. I was deceived too by her apparent calm, for there was no change in her beyond her extreme pallor. My father was not taken in, but I was. Or perhaps I should say that I found it easier to be taken in, and welcomed the deception. He, I have no doubt, accepting her self-command as a wish that none—not even he—should pry too closely into her heart, had to be content with silence. I think both of them found a kind of relief in ascribing prior rights of grief to me, as having known its object three months longer. Even so a centenarian still feels the seniority, that was his in youth, over a brother of ninety-nine.

Memory loses a few moments and then is aware that my father has left the room and is speaking with my stepmother in the passage. Gracey has gone upstairs, to her room probably. What is that Jemima is saying of her, outside?

"My dear—you will see it will be exactly as I told you. She is taking it most sensibly. But of course, apart from anything of that . . . that sort, it is the loss of a friend." Then their voices fall, and I hear nothing but that he will leave me alone for a bit, and then come back and tell me about it. And then I have an impression, probably a false one, that there are symptoms in Jemima of that serene optimism, resignation to the troubles of another. A hazy fancy about a person on the other side of a nearly closed door is not worth much.

I knew all about it before my father came back to tell me, for I got at *The Times*. Cooky had volunteered to go with two or three

others on a hazardous mission to bring in the wife of an officer then in hospital in Cawnpore, who was said to be in concealment with her young child, at some outlying compound in a district still in the hands of the insurgents. I repeat the story just as I recollect it; but, it may be, inaccurately in some points. The lady and child were brought back safely by the officer in charge, but one officer and two privates of his regiment, and three Sikhs, were killed or taken prisoners in covering their retreat from a party of pursuers. The success of the rescue was due, said the survivors, to the intrepid daring of the covering party, the leadership of which had fallen to a young officer, a subaltern who had joined recently, of whom the only survivor said, that had it not been for him, not one of the party would have returned to Cawnpore. That young officer's name was Ensign Montague Moss, of the Ninth Lancers.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

I AM ashamed to have to write it, but do so with a sense of confession and absolution, which is not without its compensation. I never really cared one straw for the employment I had embarked upon. My motive for adopting the Fine Arts as a profession was, so far as I can analyze it, entirely one of personal vanity.

No one suspected this at the time—least of all myself. Indeed there was a kind of substratum of modesty in my delusion which misled me. The thought that such an insignificant unit as myself should be endowed with the divine fire that had burned in the souls of the great painters of past ages was a consolation for that insignificance which I could scarcely be expected not to lay to heart. It was not because I was self-satisfied, but because I was self-dissatisfied, that I jumped at the decision of Jacox—in which the simplicity of my soul never detected the sneer—that I was manifestly a dab at that sort of thing. That was the spark that kindled my egotism, which really was at the time neither greater nor less than that of any other crude boy of fair ability.

Mrs. Walkinshaw fanned the flame, so far as I can guess, from sheer unqualified love of gushing. She was, you see, all soul! She intoxicated me with the names of great Italian Artists of by-gone time, the mere repetition of which is enough to make the divine fire aforesaid glow in any bosom that is respectably sympathetic. The resonance of Leonardo and Michelangelo had much to answer for with me, long before I knew enough of either to discriminate between their respective works.

But of all the fatal influences that worked for my destruction, I do believe none was worse than the letter of that lying married niece of old Gromp, who had not a particle of justification for her statement that he had said anything whatever about me and my drawings. I can even believe that my Evil Genius killed Gromp, to prevent his telling me unpalatable truths; or would have done so if the Nature of Things had permitted of his own existence.

For my father, much at a loss about me and my vocation in life, always had that unfortunate piece of false information to fall back upon. Had not a real live Royal Academician applauded my



work? He clung to this as self-justification. My conscience once prompted me to hint that Gromp had seen too little of my work to form a judgment. "The less the better!" said my father. "It shows how strong his impression was. Perhaps if he had seen a few more portfolios full, he would have said you were Michelangelo!" I cannot blame myself for having made no further protest, to correct a mistake which seemed to me in my own interest. I was nevertheless convinced that that married niece was a liar.

However, there I was—an Art Student! It was a safe anchorage, this Art Studentship, involving me only in the practice of an easy dilettantism, intersected by amusement. I managed somehow to steer clear of the slime which hung, metaphorically, about the garments of many of my fellow-students. But then I had an advantage over them. I had to look my father in the face when I returned home after work. What sort of fathers, I wonder, had *they* to keep them in check? The paternal influence, like that of Uncle Remus's mud-turtle among the animals and beastisses, was powerfully lacking, so far as I saw. And besides, they may not have had such a sister as mine, or any sister at all. That would make an enormous difference.

I find myself thinking of my twentieth year, and unable to distinguish any great difference from myself of two years before. The loss of my old school-friend had made a difference—a great difference—at home; but, at the Academy!—what shall I say? Suppose I put it that my education continued, with the proviso that no one ever taught me anything. As far as the time it lasted went, it certainly was a good education—a liberal education, in one way. If I had only been taught something!—that was all that was wanted. The only instruction I received was negative. The visitor or Curator would glance over my shoulder *en passant* and say, "You'll never do anything that way!" and would pass on to his appointed task of neglecting some one else. What he said was true beyond a doubt. But there are so many ways of painting a head wrong. If it had been humanly possible to try them all, no doubt I should have lighted on the right way at last. Even so the performer in the game called "Magic Music" is made to solve his problem in the end. Yet even he has an advantage which I had not. Nobody played loud, triumphantly, when I came within range of sound drawing or sane colour. The visitor might have said to me, for instance, "That nose is the right length," or, "red enough," as might be, and I should have left it alone, and gone on to some other feature.

There was one fatuity that I engaged in at this time which, though it did not make an Artist of me—as why should it?—made a fool of me. Or shall I rather say—made me make a fool of myself? Whichever way I put it, it comes to the same thing; it certainly made me, for awhile, a greater fool than it found me. However, I may have been the wiser for it after. Who can say?

The fatuity in question was miscalled copying Old Masters at the National Gallery. It *was* at the National Gallery—all right so far, and the picture I set about to reproduce was old—four hundred years old, I believe—and the work of a Master. Of how consummate and stupendous a Master you will know when I tell you it was the Doge Loredano. No less! But the erroneous part of the description is in the word “copying.” I take it that my delusion that I could “copy” the miraculous picture was distinct evidence that I literally could not see it—that I was in fact as blind as a bat! However, I prevented some one else “copying” it for three months—that is some consolation!

Of course I did not interfere with the young lady who was at it already. I took a place that was just vacated by her sister, who had actually been copying the Doge in pastels! I did not see the work, but I saw the dowry of pulverized washerwoman's blue and chrome yellow she had bestowed on some yards of floor round about, and wondered which part of the picture had been painted with it.

The sister on the contrary appeared to practise a great moderation in materials. She only had a chair, and worked on a block in a sketch-book. She was a water-colourist, with too little water and a very small box of half-pans of colour which were always in extremes; either parched and curling up; or glutinous, like her gamboge, which was running over into her ultramarine, and was presumably the cause of my scraping acquaintance with her.

It was not on the first day of my affront to John Bellini, as I remember that the sister's polychromatic residuum had vanished before some washerperson in the employ of the State. I remember this because the sister, coming back like a ghost from another world, and said audibly:—“Oh, I see they've cleaned up after me.” A speech which, very mysteriously, remained in my head, the rest of the day, being supplied also with a figure to speak it, whose grace remains vivid still in my imagination, though I have no doubt time has exaggerated it, as well as the beauty of the dark eyes that glanced slightly at me as their owner spoke, under cover of the pretext supplied by the reinstated floor-boards. I don't sup-

pose that those fine eyes squinted, nor may they have intended to look scornful, as I was such an utter stranger, and contempt would have been so unprovoked. But they did something that must have been squinting, as they gave the impression that they thought the tip of her nose better worth looking at than me. And the fine eyelids seemed to imply, by only rising just high enough, that the eyes were not on duty, but could be, on occasion shown. This young man was not an occasion, and if his image was blurred by fine long eyelashes, what matter? The droop of rippled hair over those eyes was not a fringe—fringes proper came later—but a compact between two friends a comb had parted, to hide as much brow as the neighbourhood supplied. I doubt whether Adeline—that was her name, heard afterwards—had any forehead to boast of, and this arrangement not only slurred over the deficiency, but claimed damages for any libellous doubt thrown on the subject.

I was not an impudent young man enough to get more than a furtive glance at this beauty, but what I got seems to have remained with me. In fact, after fifty years I do not find that her image has paled in the least, though its import—for which I can find no other name—has collapsed altogether. I do not condemn her now for the effect she produced on me. It was only an unconsidered fraction of the effect she wished to produce on the whole of male mankind, young and old, married and single. I have no doubt that a large proportion of its members came to think, in the end, that she never should have looked at it so, had she meant it should not love her. I really believe *I* did, in the end. But is it not hard on a young woman who has a fine throat, and bones—enough and no more—in her face, that she may not use a hair-wash, and droop her eyelids slightly, and leave her mouth ajar, because her doing so will stir the blood of some fool?

I need not say that, even as the vaccinated subject feels no more than a pin-prick until the virus makes up its mind to take, or otherwise, so I carried home with me—or rather was accompanied by—the eyes, the hair, the throat, the adequate cheek bone, and their mode of co-existence in the same image, without attaching any weight to the momentary effect on me of my first introduction to them. But the vaccine must have been at work by the time I got a talk with Gracey in the evening, because I was beginning to be conscious of two opposing forces; one, an indisposition to answer questions about my neighbours at work at the National Gallery, the other, a qualified impatience with my family for not asking them. I wanted a tangible occasion for denying that the

owner of the eyes and hair that produced an impression on me, without myself inaugurating conversation about her.

I thought Gracey showed penetration when she asked me, as soon as we were alone together, what the lady was like who was copying the same picture. I had only mentioned the fact that such a person existed. "A party!" said Gracey. "Of course she's a party! But what sort of a party? Is she an old party, or a young party? Is she ugly, or pretty, or stuffy, or what?"

I pretended to weigh her claims to good looks. "I shouldn't call her stuffy, exactly," said I.

"Then if she isn't ugly, she's pretty."

I was very transparent. "Oh no, *she's* not pretty," said I.

"Then somebody else is," said Gracey; as I thought, with super-human insight. "Who was it?"

"Well—Adeline. At least; her sister called her Adeline. I didn't above half see her. Only her back."

"Then she's elegant."

"I don't see that. Everybody has one."

"One what?"

"A back."

"Yes—only nobody remembers them when they're men. Then, their backs are manly. It's when they are women they have elegant backs. Come now, Jackey! What was hers? Don't be shy about it."

I thought Gracey's power of getting behind the curtain of my mind was almost uncanny. I evaded her question, and got off this sub-division of the subject. "Bother her back!" said I, dismissing it. "I *did* get a squint at her mug, you know," I admitted, my excess of slang being really dust to obscure the eyes of Europe, represented by Gracey.

Gracey refused to be blinded. "Did she squint back at you?" said she.

I lost an outwork. "She doesn't exactly squint," said I. "It's only a sort of look she has."

My stepmother was within hearing, but credited with being asleep. My father, reading Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, on the other side of the fire, had just said to her, "My dear, you're spoiling your night's rest;" and she was, I suppose, making mental notes of our conversation, for she repelled the accusation by saying with alacrity:—"No, I was listening to those young people. Who is it has a sort of look?" She raised her voice to ask this question, without turning her head or opening her eyes, to prove her case the better.

"Only a young lady of Jackey's, at the National Gallery. She's lovely and interesting. You had better ask him about her." Gracey was looking malicious, or at least amused.

"Who is the young lady, Jackey?" said Jemima, melodiously, without looking round. My father looked across the top of Boswell, also amused.

"It's all Gracey, not me," said I, explanatorily. "I don't know who she is."

"Now you're backing out, Jackey," said Gracey. "Look here what he told me, Aunt Helen. Her stuffy sister is copying his picture, and she's Adeline. And she's very beautiful and fascinating and graceful. And he got a squint at her mug. Don't say you didn't, Jackey, because you know you *did*."

"Well—suppose I did!" Both Gracey and Jemima said, I think, that it only showed what "goings on" there were at the Gallery.

My father showed a disposition to interpose on my behalf. "I must say," said he, "that I think the 'goings on' are a little . . . constructive. What did this young lady say to you, Jackey?"

"Never spoke!" said I, feeling rather rescued. "Nor me to her!"

"Oh, Jackey, you *are* backing out. At any rate, you *did* hear what she said to the stuffy sister." This was Gracey, in an injured tone.

"Of course I did. Only I didn't say the sister was stuffy."

"Oh—she's a beauty too! . . . Well—what is she then?" Because my expression had negatived this.

"Oh—her! Well, I should call her *comme il faut*. At least, the female of *comme il faut*." I reflected on the intricacies of the French tongue, and added:—" *Comme elle faute*—I suppose!"

"The question before the House," said my father, temperately. "I take to be—what did Adeline, the beauty, say to her *comme elle faute* sister?" He did not quarrel with my new departure in French—merely paused on it a moment, and passed it.

"She only looked at where she'd been sitting——"

"Where you were, you know!" said Gracey.

"Where I was at work. And said they had swept up after her. Because she had left a lot of coloured chalk behind. Where *she'd* been sitting, you know!"

"Like a hen," said my father. "Only hens I believe have no use for coloured chalks."

"Was it then you got a peep at the young lady's face?" said Jemima, not to encourage my father's choice of a simile. For, as



Mrs. Walkinshaw always said, Mrs. Pascoe's taste was absolutely perfect. She did not wait for an answer, but began a yawn, out of the end of which a resolution to go to bed took form in words. And the World, which didn't seem to think the young lady need be wound up like a Company, said oh yes!—it was actually five minutes to eleven!

I don't think the young lady named Adeline, nor her back—which I presume shared her name, somehow—interfered in' my dreams that night; but I am sure she stood between me and a measurable amount of sleep. It ought to have been a large amount to judge by the length and breadth of the waking dreams that took their place. These included rescues, by the dreamer, of the said Adeline from mysterious and vague dangers, not common in civilized Society; the running up of scores against the said Adeline, to be paid in devotion to the dreamer, during a long residence in palatial domiciles best described as *Châteaux*; the unhappy termination of an almost truculent reciprocal passion by the suicide of the dreamer and the said Adeline, the provocation to which was very dimly outlined, if indeed it could be said to have been indicated at all. I think this last eruption, or rash, of my youthful imagination was the most gratifying of the lot. As I write this I do not feel ashamed of having been such a young jackass on so small a provocation, because I believe nine men out of ten would make some similar confession if they were writing as I am, without any anticipation of a reader. Autobiography is generally written with judicious reserves, whereas I write for my Self alone—for his and my amusement. Not that that word precisely describes my motives!

The eruption—call it “first love,” if you choose—developed favourably during the five days that had to elapse before I could renew my studied insult to Doge Loredano. The morning of the fifth day found me confronting this effort and comparing it with the original; not entirely without self-congratulation, I am sorry to say. I recognized in it a good preparation. I perceived that when I came to the glazing I should get the Quality. Also the Expression.

I was confirmed in this forecast by my Academy friend, 'Opkins. He mentioned a third essential, the Feelin'. But that always *came*, with the Work. What you wanted to keep your heye upon in the early stages of a copy was the getting of it in the right place on the canvas. Once do that, the rest would follow. If you made a good 'it with your first shy at this important object, you might feel 'appy about the Expression and the Feelin'. The great thing

was to have your canvas too big. And his advice was, the minute you had got your work mars'd in ackerate, redooce it. Then, when it was reg'lar dry, and no mistake, you took it up and worked in the Expression. The Feelin' would come of itself. There was a School which preached that the Renderin' had a good deal to do with the Feelin', but he didn't 'old with it. Depend upon it, the Feelin' was an idear, and had nothing to do with the Treatment. As for the Quality, you couldn't expect that. These old beggars all had Time on their side, and we poor Moderns were helpless in the hands of Contemporaneousness.

I listened in silence to this young man's illuminations, with a furtive eye on the door through which I expected to see approach the two sisters, whom I thought I had identified, by their last week's signatures in the attendance book, as M. and A. Roper. I was a little nettled by the name, which seemed to me not in harmony with one of its bearers. But it could not be helped, and might have been worse. Just consider—it might have been Simpkins! There was no other obvious entry of sisters in the book, except a brace of Trotts, from whom my soul recoiled. I had to school it to accept Roper.

'Opkins was waiting for a canvas, and remained by me to talk. It was surprising what a number of devotees of ancient Art were waiting for materials. The gentleman who was sitting with his back to his own copy of Gevartius, talking to the young lady who was doing the Rubens, was not idling. Far from it! He was 'ung up for Indian Red. He had rashly begun Gevartius with some Indian Red of a rare and peculiar tint; and, when he had run through his toob, he went for more and found there was no more to be had, without you send to some impossible place—was it Erzeroum or Trebizond? and he would lose more time in the end by 'urrying than by waiting with patience. A spacious matron who kept her bonnet on to work was in real distress for Genuine Amber Varnish, without which her Francia was 'reg'lar at a standstill. So she conversed with a man with a skull-cap, whom 'Opkins thought a 'umbug. He never said why, and I find myself now, fifty years later, curious to know why, without the smallest chance of ever finding out. Was he a humbug, and why?

'Opkins's canvas came, and he examined it narrowly. He tightened the wedges with caution and subtlety, and then bore it away to the place beside the Indian Red man, who conversed loudly, incessantly, with the young lady who was at work on Rubens. I could just see him, through the door between the rooms, engaged in the getting of Gevartius on the right place in the canvas; mak-

ing a good hit, I trust, with the first shy. I had not got rid of him quite, though, for he came back a minute later for a piece of charcoal that would mark. "I don't believe," he said, "that mine is willer charcoal at all. Some cheap substitoot." He dwelt upon its imperfections, one of which was the presence of minute foreign bodies, as 'ard as haggit.

I trace the sensitive condition in which I was, in the relief I felt that his accent was out of hearing when the two sisters made their appearance, in charge of—or abetted by—a young woman who scorned Italian and Flenish Art, whom they addressed as Atkinson. I discerned in this that they belonged to the Better Sort. Therefore, possibly Roper; certainly not Trott!

I got so ostentatiously out of the way of the *comme elle faute* sister—made such acres of room for her—in my desire to show that I was ready to oblige; and she, for her part, was so almost hysterically anxious that I should not make any concession at all, that even the spacious matron might have found room between us to concoct a new insult to John Bellini, had she been minded to do so. A period followed of indication, by jerks, of overwrought unwillingness to interpose on the slightest impulse either showed to trespass on the neutral territory. It lasted till it was time to go out to lunch.

I tried, some fifty years later, to discover the Court where we used to feed in those days, and could not identify it. We students went there, I believe, under an impression that it was rather like Boswell's Life of Johnson to do so. There could have been no other temptation. The young woman who attended on us did not deserve 'Opkins' eulogy; that is, if I rightly understand the word "scrumptious" to be a distorted equivalent of sumptuous. Also, her hair came down, and had to be reinstated in connection with her professional services to customers. That is a delicate way of hinting at the thinness of this dining-room's veneer of Civilization. We students certainly paid heavily for our desire to feel in touch with our ancestors. This Court, however, has nothing to do with my concurrent memories of the moment. It crossed my mind as I cut my pencil, and claimed a word or two. It may do so again. I cannot say.

I returned to find that the sister's chair, with her apparatus on it, had moved to the front of the Döge. I felt that I was face to face with a problem. Gracey said to me afterwards, on learning particulars:—"Why didn't you push it back again?" I thought it seemed obvious enough that this would have been presumptuous. Fancy pushing a chair on which had sat the not unworthy sister

of so much beauty; a beauty which my imagination of last night had enshrined in Châteaux, of which I was somehow the lord and master—including of course the said beauty! I never entertained the idea for a moment: I and my easel shrank into themselves, and found them a tight fit.

I was considering what to do next to my work—being destined to spend many hours that way before it was finished—and was wondering whether the time hadn't come for indicating the expression, when an incident occurred which left me speechless.

"Oh dear!" said a female voice belonging to a rustle I had not looked round at. "How exactly like my sister! I suppose she thought you were not coming back." It was actually the beauty herself, in wash-leather gloves the worse for pastels, and a pinafore to match, covered with chrome green and lemon yellow. I found afterwards that she was "doing" a Landscape with Cattle, by Vander Somebody.

I began stammering that it did not matter the least, that the one thing I really found a satisfaction in life was making room for other people in Public Galleries, and so forth, when I was suddenly plunged in the deepest confusion by the Beauty saying unconcernedly, "Oh nonsense! She mustn't jam herself up against you like that. Perfectly absurd!" and moving the intrusive chair to its original position. Having done which, she absolutely floated away, graceful figure and all, without bestowing a fraction of a look on *me*! Evidently, *her* dreams, sleeping or waking, had been nowhere near those Châteaux.

I was puzzled, and hurt, at her taking such an impersonal view of me; though well aware that had she done otherwise, I should have sunk into the ground from sheer bashfulness. I felt that it was rather a deliverance not to have to speak to so glorious a creature. I did not feel that I could not speak to the other sister, who appeared a few minutes later; interviewing the Cattle by the way, and encouraging their copyist. I could hear the critical remark that there was a "beautiful tranquillity" somewhere. Also some undertones, with a laugh. They related to me. Then my neighbour returned. "I'm so sorry," said she. "I didn't mean to push you out. I thought perhaps you wouldn't come back. Sometimes young men go away and don't."

I didn't approve of her patronizing tone, and looked dignified. "I'm not a young man," said I. "I mean I am not that sort of young man."

"I see," said the sister. "You are studious, and have aspirations and things. Dear me!—how interesting that is!" She

took a new sable brush out of a tidy parcel and rinsed it in water; then put the end between her lips to make a nice point, at the same time looking critically at me. "Do you read books?" said she.

"Some sorts," I replied. "Not all."

"Young men sometimes read none," said she. "My brother Shafto never looks at a book, on principle. What are you reading now?"

"Dante," said I, compendiously. I was inclined to be short with her, for I did not altogether approve of a certain benignity of manner, akin to condescension.

"Dear me!" said she, speaking as if the point was not important enough for incredulity. "Dante himself? Or a translation?"

I answered a little stiffly, not without pride:—"Dante in Italian. My sister and I read the *Inferno* in the evening." This was the case, and I felt that it gave me an advantage, and would warrant superiority. I proceeded on well approved lecturer's lines:—"Dante's poetry is often very obscure. We find Cary useful, but of course refer to him as little as possible."

A moment later I was sorry. For who should come our way but the Beauty herself, all her powers of fascination at their deadliest. She wanted "the knife." It seemed they had only one, and shared it. Now I had two. To save the moist-water-colour sister an excursion into an obscure pocket, I offered the more lady-like of my two penknives, not without tremulousness, to the Beauty. She merely took it, saying:—"You're very good." And I thought she treated my offer of it much too cavalierly. I did not certainly expect a tempest of gratitude. But—to be told I was very good!

I think it occurred to her sister that I deserved to be stroked. For she said:—"This young gentleman is a student of Dante." The Beauty only said, "No really!" and went away, carrying off my knife. I found myself wondering whether she was heartless. After all those *Châteaux*! Was it possible that such loveliness should enshrine—I could not exactly say what? "A callous disposition" seemed to overstate the case. May not her obvious indifference to my Dantophilesque pretensions have been due to her clear insight into their groundlessness? It did credit to her understanding. Her moist-water-colour sister had, however, overdrawn my own claim to profundity. I felt bound in honour to remove this misapprehension, in the interests of Truth.

"We haven't done any Dante to speak of, you know, me and my sister," said I. "We've not got to the end of Canto II. after all." I believe I blushed over this admission.



The young lady laughed, and said:—"What a good truthful young man we are!" Then, as I suppose she saw that I was nettled, she went on to soothe me. Was my sister older or younger than I? Was she very fond of reading? Where did I live? Was Chelsea a nice place to live in? Wasn't it rather out of the way, across all those fields and gardens? And so on. I began to feel that I was getting quite intimate with this sister. Only—it was the wrong one!

How very awkward it would be, if any misapprehension were to occur about who was to be the destined mistress of those *Châteaux*! To be sure this moist-water-colour one might be utilized as a stepping-stone to an ascertained position of acquaintanceship, which might be made a base of operations. But would that be strictly honourable? I firmly believe that the moment this thought crossed my mind, I became colder in my demeanour towards my neighbour. I shrank from entangling her young affections, knowing as I did that her case would be a hopeless one. She must have thought me a very odd young man.

And I should now think that I must have been a very vain one. But I was nothing of the sort. I might have been if the thoughts I have indicated had really entered my mind. They never did. Call them rather specifications of the thoughts that the hall-porter of my intelligence had distinct instructions to say "Not at home!" to! I was forced to describe them, to enable him to keep them out.

I perceived that I had to steer cautiously between the Scylla of tenderness and the Charybdis of downright rudeness. Probably, in my anxiety that the rock should vanish behind the offing, I went much too near the whirlpool, without perceiving that my awkward navigation was amusing the young lady extremely. Nevertheless we got on fairly well to all outward seeming, as when I saw 'Opkins at the day's end, he said:—"You keep one hey open, Parscoe! Don't you let her get too familiar. The attention is apt to be took off by a good-looking gurl. And the 'and don't benefit, either. You take my word!' I am bound to say that 'Opkins's professional earnestness was a beautiful and edifying spectacle. If only it had been backed by a perceptible ability, in any branch of Art! But his *perfervidum ingenium* lived on itself, unsustained by any skill or discrimination of the soul it dwelt in, or any prospect of development of either in the years to come.

The day following was a day of discomposure for me. For

the moist-water-colour sister kept on imperceptibly gaining ground, however much I might conceal the fact from myself. There is no sense in pooh-poohing the burr that creeps up one's sleeve; and before I was aware of it, she was metaphorically too far up mine for me to be able to reach so far, and—always metaphorically—to drag her down. What was irritating was that this growing intimacy seemed to place the real object of my admiration on the other side of a quickset hedge, in the cultivation of which I was compelled to share, very much *à contre cœur*. I was especially chagrined towards the latter end of this day, when she invited me for the first time to inspect the small copy she seemed to be spending two days of every week on, without getting any nearer to the end of it.

The block-book she was using was too large for me to take over bodily without putting down my own palette and mahl-stick, so I dismounted from a high stool I was perched on, to inspect it. She accommodated it towards me on her lap; and I went closer, respectfully, to see.

I don't know that I agree with those who hold that "a good copy" is a contradiction in terms, like a white negro. But I do seriously think that copyists make very bad copies, and that all the world—except the Artists Colourmen—would be very little the worse if no one ever made another. I suppose the idea was nascent in my mind, or I should have been able to say something more encouraging about that moist water-colour. As it was, I am afraid what I did say amounted to a judgment that it might be quite perfect if it was done all over again by somebody else on a new sheet of paper. I was mixing it with abstract admiration, as one conceals a pill in jam, when I was aware that some one was waiting, with aggressive patience, for an opportunity of speech in my place. It was the sister—the Beauty herself; and, in spite of those Châteaux, her proximity was so alarming to me that I jumped away electrified, stammered incoherently, and turned Rose Madder.

"Oh—*pray!*—don't stop on *my* account," said she, with a mischievous suggestion in her voice that her sister and I had been deeply engrossed with our subject or each other, preferably the latter. She made it worse by adding:—"I won't interrupt you more than a second, and then you can go on *exactly* where you left off." What she had to say to her sister was a warning to her to bear in mind that the Lochkatrines, or some such name, were five o'clock, and they were not to be late.

I must say that the coolness of the moist-water-colour sister

took me aback. I thought that a reproof of such levity would have been in much better taste. She actually only said:—"You ought to be more careful, Adeline. . . . Now mind you give Mr. —I don't think I know your name?—back his knife."

"Pascoe," said I. And I think the Beauty said, "Pasport?" interrogatively to her sister, as the latter repeated, "*No!—Pascoe!*" as if she were gratified with the first syllable but under a moral obligation to the second. She may have repeated it.

Anyhow, the Beauty repeated it. "Oh, Pascoe, yes! I see. I'm so sorry Mr.—Pascoe,"—pausing as if she had already had time to lose the name—"I really was forgetting all about the knife. So good of you!" Then she went back to the Lochkatrines, goading her sister to punctuality. "It's half-past three already, and I hate a drive last thing . . . I'll send the knife. It's in my bag. . . . You can have twenty minutes more." With which she swept or floated away.

Having written down her remarks in cold blood, I have to confess to my Self that I do not now detect in them delicate raillery, originality of expression, subtle humour, acute sense of moral obligation . . . in fact, I don't detect *anything!* I did, then.

Gracey found me out about the Beauty, and surprised me by what I fancied showed shrewd knowledge of Human Nature. When I reached home that evening, I found Mrs. Walkinshaw's well-known conveyance standing at our gate, keeping its heart warm with hot-water bottles, and making a parade of its indifference to the sufferings of its Agent, on the box. Gracey was just bidding adieu to Mrs. Walkinshaw; who, perceiving me from afar, hailed me with a prolonged cry, halfway between a yell and a coo. Its greeting took verbal form as:—"Oh, here is our young hero! How is Filippo Lippi? How is Andrea del Sarto?" And then with a dropped voice of most offensive emprossement, "And how is SHE?" in capitals of outrageous magnitude, so that I really felt that the horse turned his head to catch the reply. I asked who *was* she, but I don't think I made a very strong defence. The attack was unexpected, and so unwarranted! Mrs. Walkinshaw's rejoinder was:—"That's what *we* want to know; *don't* we, Gracey dear?"

I suppose I muttered something and passed on into the house. I imagine now the good lady saying to Gracey:—"Why-y-y!—it's re-cally serious. I had no *idea* we were on such delicate ground. Now good-night—good-night—*good*-night! I must *fly*. It's positively seven o'clock." But I cannot have been within hearing of all

that after reaching the street-door. Imagination forges these speeches.

However, I am quite safe in my memory that Gracey came into the house saying to me in a most apologetic spirit:—"Just fancy! Old Walkey had been wound up and set going by my saying that you had seen an awfully pretty girl at the Gallery!"

I said rather warmly that Walkey's intelligence was defective and her flavour pronounced. Gracey said I shouldn't call "stinking idiot"—my exact expression!—but . . . but . . . how *was* Adeline? I then "pointed out" to her that she was committing precisely the same error against good feeling and good taste as Mrs. Walkinshaw. That was what I meant when I said:—"You're as bad as her!"

"Oh, Jackey darling!—you transparent boy," said Gracey. "What is there to be so conscious about? She's only a person, after all! Why—you don't know her surname!"

"Yes, I do. At least, if it isn't Roper, it's Trott." I had noted these as the only two duplicated names in the entry book.

"Oh dear!" said Gracey in a discouraged tone. "Roper! Trott! What perfectly detestable names! . . . Are you sure you're not mistaken?" This with a gleam of hope.

I shook my head. "A book in an entrance hall can't be mistaken," said I with conviction. I cannot account for the survival in my mind of this belief, after fifty years. It is as strong now as it was then.

"But you may have pitched on the wrong names altogether," said Gracey. "That's the point!"

"That's no go!" said I. "Roper and Trott are the only two's, and one of them's A, in both." So for the remainder of that day, and indeed for all the days that followed, till my next visit to John Bellini, I had to submit to raillery about an admiration I could not deny, for a young lady spoken of freely as Adeline by Gracey and my stepmother, but provisionally named Miss Roper—or—Trott by my father, who was much amused at her existence.

Next Students' Day at the Gallery—Thursday, I think—found me doing more 'arm than good to the Doge. I am quoting 'Opkins, who added:—"Lots of good work gets made gormy through not leavin' alone. You're spoiling the moddling of the chin. That heye was a lot better before. You're losin' the feelin' of the noars-trils. Keep your 'ands off's pretty nearly always a safe rule." He enlarged on the theme in this sense, until the practice of leaving canvasses untouched seemed to be the safest for the

Artist, and the one which promised him most distinction in his career.

I acquiesced, saying that I would remove my last hour's work with a little oil on a bit of rag, and await a happier mood; meanwhile concentrating my energies on the pattern. I said this partly to disfranchise 'Opkins, as I saw Adeline's sister approaching. So I felt a little impatient when he continued:—"Another ideal! Gurls next door make 'ay of any man's work. Don't you let this one get round you. You keep her at harm's length. I think, myself, they ought to be kep' separate, if any work's to be got through. They might allow 'em two of the public days. The Trustees ought to take it up, and put a step to all this millinery." I was aware before this that 'Opkins regarded Woman as chiefly Modes and Robes.

I replied to him with some dignity that I was not an ass. I understood, and could deal with, the most puzzling wiles of the Artful Sex which underlay the millinery he took so much objection to. Besides, this young lady, whom I called Miss Roper on speculation, was more dignified than Trott, had very nearly done, and was going to make a sketch of the Memling, quite out of my range. 'Opkins breathed freely, and said:—"Ah, now you'll get some work done!"

What a noble ideal was 'Opkins's! If only it had not been his lot to exemplify absolute incapacity in Art, what a future he might have had before him! The ballast was all there, but the ship was unseaworthy.

The moist-water-colour Miss Roper—or—Trott greeted me as quite an old friend. I really think that reunion after parting cements more intimacies than the heaviest *mitraille* of introductions at the first go-off. In fact, I have known the latter, when overdone, to produce an almost murderous hatred in the bosoms in which they were intended to sow the seeds of a lasting friendship. In this case there had been no introduction; little more than distant recognition. But our resurrection after five days might have caused us to fly—metaphorically of course—into each other's arms, if I had not been on my guard against any inroad of this sister into the territory in my affections which I had dedicated to the lovely Adeline.

"It really is quite a pleasure to me to find you here," said the young lady. "I was afraid you might not come." I buttoned up the pockets of my soul, so to speak; closed its lips, and forbade it the use of my eyes. This would never do. But a word more relieved me. "Because of your knife! Do you know, Mr.



Pascoe, my sister forgets *everything*! But here it is! I made her give it up to me, to make sure."

I relaxed, and protested—subject to such restraint as convention demanded—that all I had was at the disposal of the said sister Adeline. Or very nearly. I suppose what I said worked out as hyperbolical civility, for the young lady merely said equably, as she handed me my knife:—"You're very good!" I said I wasn't. Then she seemed to me to accept the position that the time had come for *causerie intime*, for she remarked, while doing absolutely nothing, very carefully, to the Doge, and varying the position of her head to see the result:—"So you are really to be a professional Artist, Mr. Pascoe? How *nice* that is!"

"We-ell—my Governor says I may, if I can!"

"Oh—how right!" The speaker seemed stricken with a kind of rapture, which she paused to enjoy. Presently she dismissed it, and mixed with Human Life again. "Oh dear!" said she. "If only all other young men's . . . Governors were like yours!"

"Wouldn't there be an awful lot of Artists?"

"*Could* there be too many, Mr. Pascoe?" This was said reproachfully, and I felt humiliated and ashamed.

"Well—of course not!" I made amends, but felt that some reservation was necessary. "Only some chaps can do Art such a lot better than others. Hadn't the duffers better shut up?"

The young lady sighed. "That seems to me," said she, "to wrap up the whole question in a nutshell. To epitomize it, as it were! Who is to presume to condemn . . . the persons whom you so picturesquely call duffers, as unfit to practise Art, when it may be that it is only their own Critical Faculty that is defective? Surely, Art is on a higher plane than mere mechanics or business in the City." I suppose I mentioned here that I could produce duffers of a very high quality from the Academy Schools where I was studying, for the young lady's next words were. "Oh, but is there not this terrible possibility? May not your *duffers*"—she emphasized the word as a protest against its slangy character—"may not they be suppressed prophets yearning to unburden their inner souls?"

I hesitated, having in mind certain fellow-students. "A . . . I think you wouldn't think so if you saw them," I said. I decided that 'Opkins, having expressed such unfavourable views of what I feel might get called in the modern Press "female Art-influences," did not deserve to be left without critical examination. "That chap I was talking to——" said I, tentatively, to introduce him.

"The gentleman who looks a little like a grown-up baby?"

"Does he? Well . . . perhaps——"

"With the complexion, and a grubby collar?"

I recognized this supplementary estimate of my friend's appearance. "Yes," I said. "Same chap! Do you think he's yearning to unburden his inner soul?"

"I should say. . . . Is he a good friend of yours?"

"Middling. Say anything you like about him."

"Well—since you give me leave—I should say he was a vulgar little man that drops his H's, with thick boots."

"Not a . . . suppressed Prophet?"

"I don't think I should say anything else about him." This was said rather stiffly, and made me a little afraid of pursuing 'Opkins as a topic. I, however, felt that I was absolutely bound to assure this enthusiastic lady that 'Opkins's inner soul, whatever his outward seeming life might be, was deeply devoted to Art, and that nothing would drag him from her Shrine. But conscience compelled me to add that he couldn't draw nor paint. Perhaps he could sculp. I had never seen him try.

"If he can't draw or paint," said his critic in a chilly manner, "I can't see that he has anything to complain of." Which seemed to me unfair to 'Opkins, seeing that neither I nor he had put in a statement of grievance on his behalf. Then she added, with an inconsistency I could scarcely have believed possible in the sister of a Beauty:—"Why—he's got a mouth like a rabbit!"

I could not defend 'Opkins's mouth, nor did I consider myself bound to do so. It was that sort of mouth that is more useful to crop herbage than to sing or laugh. I thought it quite fair that the moist-water-colour sister should censure it, after its utterances about her as a member of a Sex, and wondered what she would say if she knew them. What would her incomparable sister say? . . . But hold!—would it not be against Nature that Her lips should utter a word about 'Opkins? A creature who, in spite of his earnest soul, was unfit to black Her boots!

I hope I was not unjust to 'Opkins. But his attitude about Woman had exasperated me. To show that I was really in sympathy with my critical neighbour, I—without saying anything—produced a pocket sketch-book I had instituted to enable me to jot down Nature as she arose, and therein added a sketch of 'Opkins's sleepy face to the caricatures which were rapidly absorbing every leaf. I had developed a habit of caricaturing everything, and was considered a dab at it by my fellow-students. I myself thought of

this faculty at that time as the merest *hors d'œuvre* in the banquet of Art, not a *pièce de résistance*.

"Let me see, when it's done!" said my neighbour, rather as one speaks to a child, indulgently. But she took a very different tone about it when I handed her a spirited sketch of 'Opkins, as a rabbit, sitting at an easel sketching landscape. Her enthusiasm about Art had struck me as artificial, but no laughter was ever more genuine than hers when she took my sketch-book and looked at this production. It was perfectly splendid, she said. Why John Bellini?—why the Doge Loredano?—when such vigorous originality as this was possible. I need not say that I was gratified, though I should have been more so had these raptures been provoked by my Doge. It showed her want of tact, that she did not hail me as a Universal Genius.

A quarter of an hour later I was walking in St. James' Park, a dejected and humiliated—I might almost say maddened—boy. For what had exactly happened was this. I can see it all—can feel it all over again, as I write. And it all happened fifty years ago, and I see it across a long, long lifetime, full of real incidents, of real joys and real sorrows. And yet—it looms out large and makes my old heart beat again as though it too were reality, here in the Ward where I shall die, in the Infirmary of Chelsea Workhouse.

"You *must* let me show this to my sister," said the moist-water-colour young lady. "There is nothing she enjoys like humorous caricature. She dotes upon it!"

And who so ready as I that it should be shown to the object of my remote adoration? Yet I can hardly call the state into which the proposal threw me one of rapture. My heart thumped too savagely for that, and the consciousness of scarlet in my cheeks was absolutely painful. I endeavoured to stammer that I was awfully glad and flattered, in the most approved manner of a Man of the World.

"I shall take it and show it to her at once," said my appreciator. "Oh . . . won't that do?" For alarm and protest were in my countenance, I presume. "Why not?"

"He's there—close by! Hopkins is."

"So he is. I didn't think of that. You might go and tell her to come here. . . . No—I don't think that will do either. Stop a minute—I know! Atkinson! Do you think you know our maid when you see her? . . . Yes?—well, she's somewhere about. Just find her and say I want her. She's in the next room somewhere."

I went off to find Atkinson. Oh, how unconscious I was of what was coming!

Atkinson was a young woman whose sole object was to scorn the persons she spoke of freely as her betters. She spurned alike their Arts and their Sciences, their intellectual aspirations and their mechanical dexterity. These visits to the National Gallery had given her a rare opportunity of asserting this individuality at the expense of the great ones of old gone by. To be at the National Gallery for five hours on two days of every week, to ignore such a multitude of masterpieces all at once, and in the very same breath to peruse a thrilling tale in the *Family Herald*, was an enormous gratification to Atkinson.

I am afraid that my summons aroused her from something specially interesting in the story, as she clung like a drowning woman to the end of a paragraph, and never took her eyes off it for a moment until she could actively ignore the Choice of Paris of Rubens, of which her back only had been taking no notice hitherto—partly, I conceive, on the score of delicacy.

“Oh—Atkinson! Tell your mistress I want her here for a minute. I’ve something to show her.” I might have taken a hint from this speech, for it did not seem to apply to a lady’s maid in the joint employ of sisters. But my mind, alas, was closed to hints!

The blow was to fall, here and now. For Atkinson was one of the earliest disciples of the Modern School of servants, that says “Madam” every ten seconds, and calls its mistress “missis” no longer. “Tell her Ladyship?” said she, tartly, as a protest.

The reply showed that the speaker was one who would stand no nonsense, even from an Advanced Liberal. “Certainly!” said she.

“Tell Lady”—I failed to catch the name—“that I have a drawing I want to show her. Make haste and don’t stand there talking!” Atkinson departed.

My experience of the mystic ways of Debrett was small, but my father knew a lady in the country who was called Lady Sarah because her father was the Earl of Sportlydown, I think. I felt I *must* know more, at whatever cost. “Is your sister,” said I, hesitatingly—“is she Lady Adeline?” It was the only way I could see of mootng the point.

“Oh dear, no! We’re not such swells as all that.” I felt a relief. But it was not to last. The inhuman speech that followed came with a hideous carelessness, as the speaker was bent on subduing to her will some moist-water-colour that was out-

witting its tinfoil. "My sister is called Lady Coolidge because her husband is Sir Montague Coolidge. He's sitting for Kidderminster. But you don't care for Politics, I see."

I did not care for anything.

I don't know how this historical calamity came to be known to my family, as was most certainly the case. At the time, I thought they did not know, and that the facts were hermetically sealed in my bosom, never to be dragged out into the gaudy glare of day. I am now convinced that no silence so profound as that which enshrouded my ill-fated passion after this date could have resulted from anything but circumstantial knowledge. I am sure that if any lingering ignorance had remained that I was, so to speak, blighted, some accidental remark would have betrayed it. But the topic was never alluded to, nor any jocose remarks made at my expense, rallying me on my penchant for this unknown beauty. Is it possible that Gracey guessed the facts from anything in my manner when I returned home that evening?

I thought I acted my part so remarkably well. I was quite resolved that no one, not even Gracey, should know what an effect the discovery of this member for Kidderminster had had upon me. I would have sworn that my demeanour was normal by the time I returned home and found her alone in the house, my father having been delayed by some Committee, and my stepmother by keeping her name on somebody's visiting list. Had I not tramped half over London to be equal to the occasion?

"Is that you, Jackey? I'm all in the dark, and nobody's back. How's the National Gallery? How's the Doge of Venice?" . . .

"I haven't been at the Gallery."

"*You* haven't been at the Gallery!"

"Went for a walk. . . . I was there all the *morning*, of course."

"Don't run away upstairs for a minute. Or are your feet wet? All right! Go and get dry."

"Oh no—I'm *dry* enough, for that matter. . . . There's a nail sticking up. . . . Oh no—it won't hurt for a minute or two."

"Well—why didn't you go to the Gallery in the afternoon?"

"I don't know. The Doge hadn't dried . . . didn't get on . . . so I went for a walk."

"How's Miss Roper or Trott? How's Adeline?"

"She isn't Miss Roper or Trott. . . . Oh yes—she's Adeline, I suppose. She's Lady Something . . . Culvert or Colvin, or something—I don't know! Coolidge perhaps."



"Lady Adeline Coolidge, I suppose. But *can* Earls or Marquises or—that sort of people!—be named Coolidge!"

"She's got a husband"—the odious word may have stuck a little—"I suppose it's after *him*. I'll go and get my boots off and then come back."

"But—oh, Jackey—a *husband*! What sort? What's his name, I mean?"

I muttered something to the effect that he was a "House of Commons-ey chap, and was Sir Montague Coolidge." And further that he was "Member for some beastly town, somewhere."

"But, Jackey, why didn't you look to see if she had a wedding ring?"

"It was no concern of mine. Besides, she'd got on wash-leather gloves an inch thick, to do pastels in." And I departed upstairs for my boots. That was all!

## CHAPTER XXXV

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

ABOUT a fortnight since my dear friend, the matron of the Infirmary, forgot me and my need of writing paper, and went away on leave for a change. I didn't like to ask my other friend here, the Rev. Mr. Turner, to make good the deficiency, because he would have been curious to read what I was writing. I shall not the least mind his doing so when I am redistributed among the elements; not so very long now, I hope.

That suggests that I should rather like him to read what I have written, ultimately. How can I manage that? I shall have to make him my executor.

However, I was afraid to say to him that I wanted writing paper, as his supplying it would have brought him prematurely into my confidence. I had to await the return of Miss Ensoll, when my wants were most liberally attended to.

In that interval I lost the thread of my narrative, and began writing again with the first memories that occurred to me, which happened to relate to my fine-art experience of some two years after I first went to Slocum's. I am very uncertain about dates and periods, having nothing but my own failing Memory to go by. Just think—not a document! I ask my Self questions about the Past, but only with the result that I throw discredit on his answers.

That incident of the young woman at the National Gallery, which has kept my pencil busy since I started on my fresh quires of foolscap, is one of my most vivid recollections of this time. Trust a sense that one has made oneself ridiculous, or has been so without any effort of one's own, to keep Memory green in our souls, quite as much as the tear that we shed, though in silence it rolls, or more so!

Not that I was conscious of any absurdity in my own behaviour at the time! That consciousness was to come later. But it did come, and came upon me while every detail of my first experience of the shafts of Cupid was still fresh on the tablets of my heart; or, perhaps I should more rightly say, my imagi-

nation. For, looking back on it all now, I fail to see that my heart, in the sense I have ascribed to the word, had anything to do with the matter.

I believe it was imagination, pure and simple, that made me, after the collapse of that castle in the air, take so kindly to desolation. I need not say that I resolved that I should never wed. That resolution is the common form of unappreciated Love at first sight—I mean unpublished love, not what is generally understood by unrequited love. Perhaps the greatest word ever written on this subject of the tempestuous dawn of passion in youth—I mean, of course, Shakespeare's—would have had quite another climax if it had turned out that Rosaline was already Another's. I doubt if Romeo would have had any eyes for Juliet if his transactions with his previous charmer had been on all fours with mine and the lawful spouse of the member for Kidderminster. If he could have kindled a flame on so slight a provocation as mine, his *amour propre* would have kept it alive as mine did. But I think any one who studies the text of the play carefully will agree with me that Romeo and Rosaline must have—if I may say so—come to the scratch rather emphatically, for Romeo to have such clear insights into the young woman's private sentiments. However, things were very different in Verona, in those days.

Anyhow, that occurrence at the National Gallery plunged me provisionally in misanthropic gloom. I made a merit in my inmost heart of not committing suicide. No doubt a natural distaste for the dagger and the poison-cup contributed to the adoption of this merit, but its services remained unacknowledged. I discerned also an element of self-denial in my voluntary self-dedication to celibacy, insomuch as it pointed to the joint lives of my Self and Gracey, respected and blameless, being passed in an extremely comfortable home with a mammoth Studio attached, wherein works of European fame would grow slowly, anticipated by the Press. Very curiously, this day-dream did not run counter to a sort of Greek Chorus; a girl of great penetration and sympathy, with no looks to speak of, but with a very good figure, who read my story in my prematurely grave demeanour, and formed an attachment to me which I was unable to requite. Under such circumstances could I act otherwise than as I did? I generously bestowed my hand upon her—everything else in my gift having been blighted; and the large apartment, formerly occupied by Gracey, was assigned to my Self and the Chorus; she herself taking possession of the one I had occupied, twenty

feet by fifteen, with the view over the Earl of Somewhere's Park. I paid detailed attention to all these points.

It gives me pleasure to write one satisfactory memory in this welter of Egotism. All my day-dreams presupposed that the *status quo* was to come to a natural end. My father had to die, universally lamented, of what the American called "plain death." Imagination recoiled from a scheme which would send me to live apart from my father, and no variation of it made it possible for The Retreat to accommodate me and the Chorus, especially as we proposed to become the parents of a very large number of athletic boys and beautiful girls. My dreams assigned to my father a good, long life, and the Chorus had to wait.

It gives me another pleasure, and a great one, to recall how that dearest sister ever man had yet, made effort after effort to discover that Chorus, and to reconcile me to my lot. But the candidates for my affections that she produced never answered to my dream-forecast, in any particular. Indeed, I am afraid they were never so good-looking, in spite of express reservations on the subject of beauty, made lest I should have been supposed—by my Self, I presume—still susceptible to its influence.

I am quite sure that Sophy Curtis, who was Gracey's first experiment on the blighted sensibilities of her brother, was a very poor sample of looks, as compared with the Chorus of my dream. I can't remember what she was like, only that she was plain. She had sterling qualities, and was worthy of esteem. She dressed in sober colours, and could be identified through a substantial door panel by the sound of her boots. I fancy she must have been a Thinker, in embryo, because she lent you books, though she was barely nineteen. There was no harm in that; on the contrary, it was obliging. But there are ways and ways of doing things. Persons who converse earnestly on topics, and then lend you books, ought not to put book-marks in them to show the place. It ties you down. I would not ask the well-informed to build golden bridges to favour escape from the perusal of Sound Literature, but I do feel that catechism on passages should be a statutable offence.

Miss Curtis's individuality may have been made in Germany. She had been sent there to be educated by two credulous parents who had accepted the Teutonic estimate of its own intellectual status; the sum-total of which has no doubt grown of late years, but which did credit to Germany's powers of self-estimation fifty years ago. Her performance on her own trumpet has been *fortissimo accelerando* since then.

The Hanbury Curtises—that is the sort they were—had to take the consequences of Leipzig, where their Sophy was sent to school. For she came home omniscient. They had, in fact, constructed a Frankenstein Monster, using for raw material an ordinarily stupid daughter, such as one would impute to people of their name, comfortably off and well-connected. She came back after two years of Kultur, quoting Lessing. Gracey was immensely impressed with her solidity and reality, not unaccompanied by *geist*. “Do say she’s clever, Jackey, at least!” said Gracey, after I had declined to admit that she had any looks whatever; and had, in fact, suggested that she had been bitten by a *hausfrau*, and that the *virus* had permeated her system and altered her appearance.

“How do you know what she talks is really German, and not make-up?” said I. To which Gracey replied:—“How can it be anything else, when she’s been at Leipzig?” I endeavoured to put into words an impression my first introduction to this young lady had given me, to the effect that she looked as if she believed you were already confuted in some discussion; and would be next time, so had better not offer opinions. I did not succeed, getting no further than:—“Why does she always look as if she had come in in the middle, and knew better?” Gracey only called me Silly Jackey, so I conclude that she saw truth in the description.

I suppose it was just as well that I should treat this young woman with undisguised scorn, as my doing so prevented Gracey forming any false hopes of success. I am afraid I was moved to reject advances on her behalf by what may have been honesty, but certainly was not modesty. I am convinced now that young men need not be so very much on the alert to prevent young women falling in love with them. If they will postpone their super-sensitiveness till later in life, and not run into the opposite extreme of taking for granted that forty-odd, for instance, gives *carte blanche* to friendship with feminine juniors, their essays towards conscience will, to my thinking, not be wasted. Mine were, in this instance; and Gracey’s hopes that I had found a haven would in any case have been disappointed. For the haven—a dry dock would be a better metaphor—was already occupied by a German ship. In other words, Miss Curtis had been for some months plighted to a Professor with seven consonants and one vowel in his name. The nearest I can go to it now is Spretsch. Very likely it is wrong.

Gracey was so convinced that sterling worth and a well-informed mind were what were needful for my happiness that she clung



to Sophy Curtis with tenacity to the very last. She never could bring herself to believe that I regarded the young woman with . . . Well!—I will not say abhorrence . . . but with—if the expression can be permitted—startling indifference. So far as I could resent anything done by Gracey, I resented her choice of such a prudent and right-minded and clear-sighted person as the partner of my soul. I did not want a plain pudding, however well-made. I wanted raisins, and sudden unsuspected lemon-peel, and citron.

I really was relieved when one day Gracey came home from the Curtises not exactly boiling with indignation, but with heat-bubbles throwing out hints that she might ultimately do so. The Teuton, Spretsch, had been there, and Sophy had actually taken her aside to say with triumphant mystery:—"I see you have guessed our secret!" Whereupon my dear little sister, taken aback, had said, grammarlessly:—"Who's *us*?" To which the reply was:—"Why, of course, the Herr Professor and myself, dear Gracey! Who should it be?"

My reception of this intelligence justified an expression I have used, for my indifference did really startle its hearer. I drew a German Professor, with a phrenological forehead and a piercing gaze, on the last empty page of my pocket sketch-book; and Gracey was interested, as she always was in my caricatures, though she recognized that my mission was loftier. This time, she only remarked that Sophy's Professor wasn't the thick sort; but was just as intense, or intenser.

I do not consider that Gracey played fair when she tried to prove that visible admiration of her Curtis on my part had suggested our adjustment as a couple. It was all very well to deride Sophy now, she said, but I hadn't done so the first time I saw her. On the contrary, I had offered to lend her *James Lee's Wife*, to prove my position that Browning was obscure, and, indeed, unaware of his own meaning. To avoid acknowledgment of anything whatever, which might have weakened my position, I treated Browning's intelligibility as the point under discussion, and said:—"Well—I was quite right, anyhow. You know you don't know what he means, or any one else." However, this red herring failed. "You perfectly well know," said Gracey, "that you *did* lend it to her, so it's no use pretending you didn't." I said, with warmth:—"Very well, then! I suppose one's spooney about every girl one lends *James Lee's Wife* to, no matter how dried-up she is."

It was some time before Gracey submitted another sample for my approval. Or, perhaps I should say she was timid in the

selection of candidates, and did not push their claims resolutely enough. Now that I think over the time, I see that the whole of it was chequered with Gracey's friends, and cannot help suspecting what never crossed my mind then, that every separate one of these very excellent young women was weighed in the balance, carefully considered, and either accepted or rejected as qualified for the headship of that household with the mammoth Studio, or its equivalent in my sister's mind. On my side, the rejection of the accepted ones was vigorous and decisive, and I have reason to believe that the only one that found any favour at all in my sight was still in the balance when I was introduced to her, and was found wanting in the course of a very few days. Her name was Cynthia Lowndes, and she was a large coal merchant's daughter. The adjective here qualifies the father, but it was not inapplicable to the daughter. So it seemed to me when I entered our drawing-room only knowing that Gracey had a friend there, but with a sidelong curiosity to see what the friend was like.

The uncertainty continued after I had entered the room. For it was half-dark, and I could not see the face of the occupant of our sofa, who was therefore, to all intents and purposes, a skirt, gloves, and a parasol. Gracey was at the end of the sofa, outside it. Otherwise she would have had to sit on the skirt, for these were the days of voluminous crinolines; and a side-fling on a fauteuil, covered in thereby, was an attitude much affected by fashionable elegance. I was in its presence, evidently; and touched the glove it extended to me with some trepidation on being introduced as Gracey's brother Eustace to Miss Cynthia Lowndes, who—said Gracey, was so very kind as to offer us two places in a box at the Opera, because the Nickensons had disappointed her. It was very tiresome of Kate Nickenson, who might have known that her sister-in-law wouldn't pull through.

I was still at that time pursuing a policy of morose isolation, which I assigned in my own inner consciousness to that misadventure at the National Gallery, but which was probably only a crotchet of an inexplicable egotism—a young man's craze which would have taken some other form if I had never crossed the path of the fascinating Adeline. I therefore suggested that Gracey had better get Jemima to go, as I had an engagement and a cold, and never went anywhere in the evening when the Life School was on, and so forth—all feeble excuse-mongering.

"Oh, nawnsence!" said Miss Cynthia Lowndes, who drawled. It amuses me to spell her pronunciation literally. "You mast

calm, aw we shahn't have a gentleman. We must have a gentleman. Yaw broth'rawt to be ashamed, Miss Pascoe, to try to put us awf with Je—maima! . . . Oh, I'm sawry, but how was I to know?"

"How *could* you know?" said Gracey, who had murmured that I meant Aunt Helen. She added that I really ought to take care what I said before visitors.

"Oh, thank you so march," said Miss Lowndes. "Visitahs is so march bettah than strainjars. Of cawcee, visitahs." I took a shrewd glance through the gloom at the lips that spoke, and perceived that they were—shall I say fruity? Also that they harboured white teeth. I made concession, saying:—"Isn't it rather rot to be so particular?" The net result of this tended towards the dispersal of Miss Lowndes's strangership.

"Well!" said Gracey, with her chin in her palms, and her elbows on the end of the sofa, outside which she was kept by her visitor's expansive skirt. "The point is, Jackey, will you go to the Opera on Wednesday, or will you not?" I said of course I *could* chuck the Life for one evening, if you came to that. Gracey said:—"Very well, then, *that's* settled! You're to chuck the Life." I remember thinking, then and there, that in consideration of my sad experience, Gracey might begin to treat me a little more like a man. I did not think long, because Miss Lowndes was hurrying away, and I wanted to see her face under the gas lamp in our entrance hall. Who could know she was not that Greek Chorus?

"*What* did you say your friend's name was, Chick?" said my father to Gracey the evening after the Opera.

"Cyn Lowndes," said Gracey. "Cyn's short for Cynthia." I was rather taken aback when she added:—"I'm not sure that I like her. I don't know."

"Short for Cynthia, is it? That's why I asked. Who was to know that it wasn't short for Eve and the Serpent and the Garden of Eden? But why don't you like her, Chick? Don't other people's chicks like her?" My father was evidently curious about the young woman, whom he had only just caught sight of on the previous evening.

But Gracey was cogitating over the name. "Why Eve and the Serpent?" said she. Then she fructified. "Oh, I see! But it's not spelt the same." She evidently could not find reason for her verdict of dislike. But she repeated it, with reinforcements. "Well—I'm not sure that I do. In reality, I'm not sure that I'm not sure that I don't like her." I think she repented a

little of her style, for she counted her negatives on her pretty finger tips, to see if they were right.

"Won't it wash?" said my father, waiting. To which Gracey replied:—"Don't talk and I shall be able to see. . . . No, it never comes right when once it seems wrong. Anyhow, I don't—well—I don't *love* her!"

"I think it's a jolly shame of you to back out, G.." said I. "You were such nuts upon her at first. Anyhow, she *did* take us to Covent Garden—you must admit that!"

"Jackey's *épris*," said Gracey, maliciously. "It was the rose-coloured satin with the eiderdown facings." I did not condescend to reply. "Or perhaps it was the pearl necklace. Or the throat. Or the shoulder-traps. Shoulder-straps go a long way."

Gracey's penetration was unaccountable. My stepmother's attention was attracted by the shoulder-straps. "I thought them bad style," said she. "Perhaps I'm old-fashioned." I saw that the shoulder-straps had a good deal to answer for. I said, lying deliberately, that I had not taken particular notice of the shoulder-straps, and Gracey looked incredulous. They were the sort that are said to have had a large share in the consolidation of Anti-Vaccination.

We never saw very much of Cynthia Lowndes. She creeps into my recollections because she was the only young person in whom Gracey discerned a suitable *partie* for myself—because I am sure she did so, in the very first hours of our acquaintance—and for whom I personally entertained any sentiment except one of stolid indifference, sometimes with a flavour of antipathy as slight as the suspicion of onion that a skilful cook produces by rubbing a clean-cut bulb on the interior of a cooking vessel. Whether it was the shoulder-straps that made one of Cupid's shafts graze me in an otherwise wasted flight I no more know than I do what part it was of Cynthia's behaviour at *La Somnambula* that made her stand lower in my dear little sister's good opinion. It may have been that she felt that the young lady's drawl could not be endured *sine die*. Or that the drawler's male acquaintances—faultless in broadcloth, spotless in linen, reminiscent of half-crown cigars—so evidently wondered who the devil Mr. and Miss Pascoe were, when that young lady and gentleman were introduced *pro forma*; and excluded them from their knowing conversation about who that was in the Royal box, and how Trebelli wasn't up to her usual mark tonight. I don't think these swells—as I suppose they were—destroyed our enjoyment of the *Somnambula*, but I think we felt out of our element.

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I suppose the fact was that Miss Cynthia's chaperons had failed her suddenly, and that she could not suit herself with a substitute at a day's notice; so had to fall back on that harmless little Miss Pascoe, that limped, whom she had met at the Choral Society. The other gentleman of the party was Sir Somebody, but he took no notice of us, and I have forgotten his name.

It goes without saying that the meteoric passage of this young lady across the sky of my imagination left no trace behind. My self-respect at that time was involved in the maintenance of a constellation, the memory of the National Gallery beauty. *Amour propre*, like the shoulder-straps, goes a long way—only in the opposite direction—in steadying the unreal fancies of a dreamy youth. That is what I was, for many years. I was unreal in my choice of art as a profession—unreal in my vacillations on the outskirts of Love. The two chance samples of the latter fire, divine or otherwise, that I have referred to, both had exactly the same character, that the tinder caught almost before the flint showed a spark.

I am not sure that that dear sister of mine was good for my prospects in this very important department of life. If it had been the decree of Fate that I should have sons and daughters, I should have besought and enjoined the daughters not to meddle with the love-affairs of the sons. They would have been in no danger of interference in theirs. Their insignificance would probably have protected them; or, perhaps I should say, their brothers' absorption in their own greatness, and confidence that *their* sisters would never have *penchants* for that idiot Brown, that booby Jones, or that ass Robinson. But I would have said, to those daughters:—"At least, when you detect a germ of interest in some young lady on your brothers' part, do not call out to them across the room that you perceive they are falling in love with Zenobia or Semiramis or Mary Ann, as may be! See nothing, but do not announce that fact, and urge Zenobia and your brother to go on and never mind you!" I would have pointed out to those daughters, that whoever wishes to fan a flame should do it very gently at first, and not like a Whitehead torpedo; and that it is better, on the whole, to leave the nascent spark alone, to live or die as the fuel and the atmosphere decide. But no son or daughter of mine ever grew up, so I have had no chance of saying all this to any one.

There were two sides to my susceptibility to Gracey's influence. The reason that I was so contented with my home life, and



sought so little—or rather, not at all—the alleviations that so many youths find in a succession of fruitless flirtations and engagements, was that Gracey's own companionship went so far to make these alleviations unnecessary. I know that no sister's love can make good the total absence of the other sort from a man's life. Yet it may stand between him and an active consciousness of his deficiencies. That was one reason why Gracey steered my boat, and why I never looked ahead to guide it.

The other was connected with a vision that, do what I would, haunted me at intervals—Gracey forsaken in spinsterhood, and even kept away from me by the very marriage she herself had promoted. I found that whenever I “offered in” an image of one of Gracey's nominees as sole mistress of the house attached to the mammoth Studio, some untoward domestic problem was to the fore, of which Gracey and the said nominee propounded different solutions. I tried Miss Sophia Curtis in an inexplicable dress which I thought suited her, and expressed generally the terms of our marriage. Videlicet, toleration on my part; and on hers penitence for the views she had entertained of Lessing, who figured in my dream as a sort of personification of all things German—*geist* for instance. She had not wedded the Leipzig Professor yet, so my dream involved no outrage on morality. In my air-castle she and Gracey did not “hit it off” at all. I found my hypothetical Self, while I always took Gracey's part, pointing out to her that it was really she that was to blame, for bringing about a union between her brother and one who, with the highest moral qualities, had no soul whatever, and was—if the truth must be spoken—little better than a dried up prig, an opinionated doctrinaire, without personal attractions that might have compensated a loving husband for her spiritual shortcomings. Gracey, the hypothetical, wept; and acknowledged, now that it was too late, the rash presumption of the officious bystander who interfered with and thwarted the decrees of Providence and Destiny, who had evidently said to one another that Eustace Pascoe, R. A., whose ideal had unfortunately wedded the sitting member for Kidderminster, would cultivate his rare genius best as an unmarried man, whose devoted sister would keep his house and darn his socks, and sit admiringly at the feet that awaited them. I have observed since then that Providence and Destiny are weak characters, whose little plans are always being upset by meddling outsiders.

When, instead of the image of Miss Curtis, I supplied that

of Miss Cynthia Lowndes, the *dénouement* of the drama was more exciting, and had more the character of a Problem Play. What happened was entirely the fault of this image, which threw itself at my feet, or did something too pointed for me to overlook. I am not sure that it did not underline the words "Upon that hint I spake" in Othello on our drawing-room table at The Retreat, and hand me the volume open. That weak character, Destiny, then managed to get one of her Decrees attended to, and an ill-assorted union was the result. The husband soon wearied of the shallow superficial nature to which he had been blinded by shoulder-straps or by Bad Style, suppose we say—and became more and more absorbed in his Art, which the shallow superficial nature could not the least understand. The image of his sister, always devoted to him, endeavoured in vain to stem the rising tide of connubial indifference. He retired morosely to his Studio, where lunch was brought to him on a tray. Naturally, the superficial one, thus deserted, flashed her effulgence on Society, with the result that the Better Sort thereof looked askance at her. She didn't care, because her beauty, which was undeniable, ensured her a following of devoted admirers; chiefly I believe, Baronets, half-pay Officers, and Wits. I am at a loss to account for the selection now, but I certainly remember it. The Better Sort of Society then went a step further and declined to meet her. The dream, which was like the mixture that may be taken before, during, or after meals, terminated variously at different times. Sometimes it was a Guilty Couple. Sometimes the curtain fell on reconciled misunderstanding, amid the execrations of baffled Baronets; sometimes on magnanimous forgiveness by my own image, which I am inclined to think was ill-executed; and penitence, by that of the principal female character, which certainly was uncalled for, if the Mrs. Spooner whom I met thirty years later had really been Cynthia Lowndes. However, she vouched for it, and must have known. I did not mention the dream.

It was a dream that pleased me to dwell on, but I doubt if I recognized the reason of my satisfaction at the time. It was that it was open to such a gratifying end; the return of Gracey banished by the Superficial Nature, to my desecrated hearth. The solace, renewable at will, of commiseration from Gracey's image, far in excess of my deserts, was indescribable. My own image, I need hardly say, posed as that of a generous martyr, and accepted homage from Gracey's in such plenty, that I marvel now that I never detected my imposture. I never did. I con-

sumed, in any quantity in which I chose to supply it, the coarsest food that ever was offered to the palate of egotism by its own unchecked cook.

I confess to feeling angry with my Self, that he never suggested to me an explanation of Gracey's devotion to her silly young brother. He might at least have said to me:—"Stupid boy, can you not see how much less active your sister's interest in your *affaires de cœur* would be if she had any of her own?" He would not have needed to force home to my mind the cause of her ready acceptance of spinsterhood. I recognize it clearly now, as I look back, but I am very sure I did not see it then, and indeed very unsure that she did. I see now that she tacitly accepted the effect of Monty's death, but I doubt if she scheduled the terms and conditions of her own life. She did not say to herself, "I shall never marry, because I shall never love any man as I loved Monty," for the simple reason that her affection for that friend of her girlhood had never been officially defined as Love. I can almost find it in my heart to write that it was just plain affection, unstained by Love; but strong enough to wound to the quick, and leave an uneffaceable scar. I conceive that she may have worded the matter in her own mind thus:—"If I were another sort of girl, with admirers and no limp, and one of them was breaking his heart about me, I might marry him to be obliging. And I daresay he would be a very good boy in his own way. But it never would be the same as if. . . ." And there thought would come to a *cul-de-sac*, or hark back a year or so to the old days, and that last parting, and their only kiss.

But none of this reached my mind through its panoply of selfishness, and I continued to accept as my due—Heaven knows why!—my sister's constant thought for my well-being, and to give unquestioning acquiescence to her own version of herself—that *she* didn't matter! I did not take her word for it, for she gave me none. It was, somehow, an understood thing; the understanding of which was partly due to a kind of docility on my part, which might I hope have varied had Gracey's inner conviction that she scarcely counted for anything had a less mesmeric effect on me. This disposition on my part did not vary, or rebel against the absurdity of that misunderstanding, and I am afraid I cultivated it for the sake of the benefits that accrued. Anyhow, I was too little on the alert about the inner life of a sister whom I nevertheless really loved, to be alive to the undercurrent of her history.

Sometimes, in writing all this, I hope I am too severe on that

crude silly Self that I look back on now, fifty years later, knowing that it was mine, and hoping that it was no worse than the averages Selves of its fellow-units of the same age and sex. Oftener, that hope becomes a certainty, and then follows the reflection that that certainty is not worth having. For, think of the standard of manhood it sets up! How can old age retain any self-respect at all, if its youth has been no better than the male average? It is such a meagre satisfaction, to think that one has been, after all, no worse than anybody else.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

It is easier for me to write recollections at random—to tell mere events; anywhere, anywhen—than to fix dates and assign priorities, without a clue or a document for guide. I could not write at all if it were not that now and again a fact jumps out with an indisputable numeral and clears chronology.

This happened when I wrote about that visit of Cooky and myself to our old home in Mecklenburg Square. The year of this was the first year of the Indian Mutiny, for was not my friend just on the edge of departure? The news of his death came in the beginning of '58. I remember as a fact, referred to at the time, that this was in our third Chelsea year. We must have been there just over two years—since the end of '55. But the date I am especially referring to, which these evolved, is that of a letter my Uncle Francis wrote to my father on the occasion of the renewal of his three, five, and seven years' lease to his tenant, Mr. Hawkins. This was necessarily '62—and I was not yet twenty-three.

I remember the letter, and the mention in it of Mr. Hawkins's short lease, which he wanted to rejuvenate as a long lease. Also that Mr. Hawkins had laid some stress on the removal of some goods belonging to his landlord, as he declined to warehouse them any longer. The letter seemed to imply that this gentleman had made their removal a condition precedent of the new lease. I am clear about this. But I cannot remember enough of the other substance of the letter to be sure of my Uncle Francis's reasons why the removal of these celebrated boxes in the top attic of our old house should be undertaken by my father rather than by himself. I have an impression that he cited some super-subtle legal reason why, founded on the law relating to marriage settlements. How he worked this out I have now not the dimmest idea, but I suspect that his reason was simple enough. He was lazy and did not want the trouble of deciding what was to be done with the goods. My grandmother, who was over ninety, but more truculent than ever, had put her foot down, and flatly forbidden that they should be brought to her residence at Highbury. His



own chambers in the Temple were out of the question, and I rather think he was not at the time on speaking terms with my Uncle Sam, or he might have asked him to provide warehouse room for them.

I am not sure whether I do or do not recollect hearing somehow that my Uncle Sam had refused to have anything to do with chemicals; for that was the description always given of the contents of the two unopened boxes—unopened, I mean, on that momentous occasion of the discovery of the Heliconides. I conjecture that they had been examined since then sufficiently to determine the nature of the contents. My ascription of this refusal to Uncle Sam may, however, only be due to the reaction on my mind of subsequent events. Shall I, I wonder, live long enough to relate them? On the whole, I hope not. I shrink from the telling of many things that must be told, if I carry out my scheme of writing all I can recollect. For I would very gladly forget many of them.

"What makes your worthy uncle so keen that I should see to these boxes?" said my father. "He seems to have unpacked and removed the one or two things of any value, and it appears that nothing is now left but bottles of chemicals with no label. Now if there is any useless possession in the world, it surely is a chemical without a label. Why can't he throw the contents away, and sell the bottles?"

However, my Uncle Francis got his way, whatever it was that made him so tenacious. It is possible that one thing that influenced my father was my suggestion that at any rate it would give Freeman a job. I advanced it not so much because I loved Freeman, as because he had always seemed to me part and parcel of Mecklenburg Square—a kind of guardian genius almost. To employ any one else on a job at "the Square" would have been playing fast and loose with an unwritten obligation. To have disallowed Freeman in this connection would, I am sure, have seemed to my father to be taking a mean advantage of the fact that no obligation whatever existed. He therefore wrote to Freeman, enjoining him to call for the boxes and bring them to The Retreat, making such arrangement about a cart or truck as he might judge best, and enclosing a letter explaining the application to Decimus Hawkins, Esq., easily identified in the Directory.

Therefore also it was that, some five or six days later, our servant Raynes appeared spontaneously to my stepmother and Gracey, and addressing the latter because she was only licking a postage-stamp, whereas Jemima was writing a letter, said:—"If you

please, Miss, The Man has brought the boxes." In which I discerned, when Gracey told me of it afterwards, the mystic influence of Mr. Freeman's atmosphere; his style, title, and mission having been unquestioningly accepted from him by Raynes, who had never seen him before, and who, by the by, had come to us in Chelsea, and had never known the Square.

"I said they were to go in Thomas's loft over the stable," said Gracey. "That was right, wasn't it?"

"I suppose so," said I. "Only I'm not sure the Governor didn't want to have a look inside them and see if there was nothing else."

"Oh well!" said Gracey. "Thomas will have to get them out again when they're wanted." Then she seemed alive to some observance due, not to be lightly neglected or passed by. "Hadn't you better see The Man?" said she. "I believe he's still in the kitchen." So he was *obligato*—so to speak—and I felt it my duty to go and speak with him, as representing the Family.

Now, there was not a particle of reason why I should go and confer with Mr. Freeman. But Gracey had asked the question with such confidence that I should have felt it almost irreligious not to comply. He met me halfway, owing to intimations received of my approach. I have no means of knowing whether he was the worse, or better, for the last half-pint hospitality had yielded him. The former, I hope, for the sake of his antecedent condition.

"Good evening, Freeman," said I, articulately; no slurring of syllables such as social equality would have countenanced! "You've brought the boxes?"

"Yes—'ere! I was told to fetch 'em 'ere, and 'ere I fetched 'em. You can count 'em yourself. Or any man." He appeared to be needlessly on his guard against some insidious attack, and to suspect me of being a scout.

"I expect they're all right," said I, groundlessly. "Did you explain to . . . the Gentleman at the House?" For I had forgotten the name of Hawkins, and it was not essential.

"I made a p'int. I says to him, allow me to 'and you this here letter. I says. Which will acquaint you. And I 'ands him the Master's letter, wrote with his own 'ands."

"And he read it? And what then?"

Mr. Freeman seemed still obsessed with that idea that I wished to outflank him, and it was not without triumph that he responded:—"Nothin' then!"

"What did he say? He must have said *something*!"

"Never said nothin' to me!"

I saw an opening. "He said something to *somebody*. Whom did he say it to?"

"Now you're a-gettin' at it, Master Eustace. He says to Miss Sylvear, who was reading of a volume aloud where I was shown in, being allowed upstairs like once in a way, and not being frequent above the basement, comin' in by the airey steps of mornings. . ." He felt about in vain for the idea he had deserted.

"Well—she was reading a book. What did he say to her?"

"Right you are, Master Eustace! Peroozin' of it through aloud, as they say. Regarding of what he says to her:—'You'll excuse me, my dear Sylvear,' he says, that bein' his peccoliar way of haxentuating of her, bein' he's one of these here mealy-mouthed characters. 'Would you oblige me by listening to this here letter!' And she says:—'Since you wish it, certainly,' she says, and shuts in the paper-knife, for to keep the place."

"And then he read the letter, and said you might take the boxes. Go ahead!" For I wanted to be washing up for dinner.

But Mr. Freeman's condition and method forbade hurry. "Askin' your pardon, Master Eustace, he said no such a thing. What he *did* say was—this here ree-quired consideration. Then her and him they had it up and down, and the lady she won't have chemicals in boxes carried downstairs over her carpets, and very likely destroy the wall-papers as well."

"Did the Governor say anything to these parties about chemicals?" I asked because I had heard very little about chemicals, and did not know where the idea came from. I may have pronounced the first syllable too clearly, for Mr. Freeman seemed to have heard the word for the first time, and to be unaware that he had just uttered it himself.

"Chemicals!" said he. "I never heard no mention of any such. Her word were kimmy culls, spoke plain, and she wouldn't have any such acrost her stair-carpet, not if she knowed it. Then her brother—which he is—and no use his denyin' of it—he says, meek and oily, which is his way, there ain't no way down from the articks only just the staircase, unless she means by climin' down a ladder, outside. Then does he take her for a fool, she says, seein' one ladder wouldn't above half reach up, and would have to be double the length? Likewise she says, if the Port Admiral was tryin' explosives, who could say they might not fall on the Public's head, and explode spontaneous, and who would be held responsible? So I says I'd go and attend to my boots, the whilst they come to an understanding . . . ."

"Well—the boxes are here now . . . !"

"Ho—yes! They're here now fast enough, now I've got 'em here. Some mightn't have. Only Miss Silver Ear she see to old newspapers being laid all down the staircase, she's that nice and partic'lar over the 'ousehold. . . ." Mr. Freeman's clearer speech, unencumbered by obligation to report accurately, defined the lady's name. I cut his story short, seeing that Raynes was ringing an admonitory bell just close to my head, and went to get ready for dinner. I heard him intercept my father, who was just coming in, from whom he probably exacted a tribute.

I asked my father that evening what Freeman had meant by the explosives, and he said it must have been a fancy of my Uncle Francis, because Helen had heard something of the sort at Highbury. I should mention that my stepmother never lost touch with my grandmother and uncles, paying intermittent visits which remained unreturned, except indeed by my Uncle Sam, who had apologized himself out of his family's condemnation of my father, and maintained a position towards The Retreat compounded of Christian Forgiveness as a lubricant to social intercourse, admiration for Jemima as a fine woman, and I think some genuine affection for Gracey. Now my stepmother had conversed on the subject of these boxes with Uncle Francis and his truculent mamma; so, naturally, my father referred to her about the meaning of The Man's obscure allusion to explosives. We were in the drawing-room at the end of the day when he did so—he and I beginning a game of Chess; she and Gracey busy over Patience.

"I told you," said she, "and you've forgotten. The old Admiral was supposed to be an authority on explosives, and I believe he was going to make a great discovery, when he died. They said so. And Mr. Francis says those bottles are full of his invention, but they are all safe as long as no one touches them."

"Just like Francis!" said my father. "Why—the bottles are full of a sort of treaclely stuff. Who ever heard of explosive treacle? However, nobody means to touch them . . . I can castle—it's not across a check." The explosives lapsed.

A crisis was afoot in the card game also. "No—it's a deadlock. Begin another!" said the official player. But the other said:—"No—look here! Queen on King, Knave on Queen, ten on Knave, nine on ten, eight on nine . . ." and so on. And as players of Patience are always carried away by a visible climax ahead, the explosives were forgotten, and remained forgotten for some years to come. At least, I remember no further mention of them.

I think a discussion as to whether a King can castle across a square that has been under a check, and is now free, may have helped the oblivion. The King can, of course. A check does not linger like magnetism in steel. But I should have been so very glad that my father should have been unable to castle, in that game, that I was strongly biassed towards an honest belief that it was at least an open question. I cannot account to my Self—who reproaches me with forgetfulness for my ability to recall that position on the board, and my uncertainty as to how the explosives were lost sight of. But what can I do? This is a record of what I do remember, not what I ought to remember.

The Student of Human Nature really ought to turn his attention to that curious subject, Matrimony. As I understand, he has been so busy with Love and Infidelity—especially the latter—that he has postponed the investigation of the effects of mere unqualified marriage, apart from complication of personal affection. I mean marriage considered as harness—the subjugation of a pair, irrespective of their desire to submit to it, or their ability to endure it.

Fully to grasp the nature of the questions raised, in the absence of this Student—who would probably be of no service, if present—we have to constrain the Actual within the limits of a hypothesis. First we have to conceive of a couple absolutely indifferent to one another, free from any bias whatever, whether of Love or Hatred. You will say—if you ever exist, which I doubt—that this is an impossible hypothesis. I shall reply that there is no such thing as an impossible hypothesis. The supposition that a hypothesis is possible is an integral factor of its existence. Therefore the phrase “impossible hypothesis” is a contradiction in terms.

But after all, does this hypothesis strain possibility so seriously? Look at the Whittakers, whom Varnish had lived with a many years before ever she come across my pa and ma. She always introduced them into conversation thus, and developed their individualities later. Mr. Whittaker rose early and caught the 'bus. He was that took up with business that he was always home late—not once, but always! And, Sundays, you would hardly believe it, but he always went to his mother's at Rickmansworth. If Mr. Whittaker had any other characteristic whatever, Varnish remained reticent about it; hence it continued unknown, she being the only informant. He never was presented to me otherwise than as the husband of Mrs. Whittaker, pure and simple;



his existence and its whereabouts and whenabouts being the only facts communicated. Mrs. Whittaker, on the other hand, welcomed the Spartan simplicity of her lot, and saw to the housekeeping. She had enough to do ordering dinner, and keeping an eye on things, to be able to dispense with human intercourse; and she had never held with men in the house, so that the necessity for Mr. Whittaker's presence in the City did not distress her. When he did return home to the banquet, whose preparation had absorbed her day, he just swallowed it down and went to sleep in his armchair, and his wife did not complain; besides, she had to see the cook.

That really contains all the information Varnish had to give about her former Master and Mistress, and I think it warrants me in speculating on the existence of a married couple, absolutely unbiassed by either Love or Hatred, and as such presenting a proper subject for the Student of Human Nature, if he can persuade himself for awhile to forego the luxury of solving recognized problems, which do not arise until one of the subjects conceives an unholy—or holy—passion for somebody else. What would he make of Mr. and Mrs. Whittaker; supposing that additional information had confirmed the impression I had from Varnish's description of them?

But really these amiable and respectable persons have no place in a record of my recollections, unless indeed it is that the married couple that set me off thinking about them was my father and stepmother. This does not the least mean that the cases were alike. If it had been the other way round—if the Whittakers had made me think of *them*—I grant that there might have been a similarity. As a matter of fact, it was a marked dissimilarity in their case that was foremost in my mind when I caught myself recalling the amusement I gave Gracey by a grotesque sketch I made of Mr. and Mrs. Whittaker, as imagined from Varnish's account of them. I had said to myself:—"Suppose the Governor had been like that, I wonder how Jemima would have stood it!"

This and similar problems about marriage, always suggested by the permanent puzzle of my father and his second wife, very often exercised my speculative powers in those days. But I kept them to myself, not even taking Gracey into my confidence. Perhaps her never seeking it influenced me. It may be that she always retained a girl's view of the constitutional ignorance of a boy to understand the private affairs of the heart, an ignorance which often lives till the coming misinterpretations of Manhood warp and distort every sacred truth. Most girls are like that. They know all about it, all along. They have a singular faculty

for combining an intimate knowledge of the important points of the subject with an almost complete ignorance of the secondary ones. In this connection the views of Mrs. John Anderson claim consideration.

I most earnestly hope now that my father never felt handicapped by the presence of his children in his demeanour towards his second wife. It was certainly not demonstrative. He, however, fell far short of what may be called the cultivated indifference of Mr. Whittaker as described by Varnish. I cannot assign to the image I retain of that gentleman any such solicitude about the sleepless nights of Mrs. Whittaker, if any, as my father's about my stepmother's. It was so permanent and real a trouble to him that I could always tell by his appearance at breakfast whether Morpheus and Jemima had hit it off. Not that her insomnia disturbed his night's rest. He slept through it and got his information afterwards.

He often talked to me of this plague when we sat and chatted over our experiences of the day, after dinner in the library. It was, he said, a most grievous affliction; and it was very hard that it should visit one pillow so persistently. Why could he not have his share of it, instead of sleeping like an Ephesian? When he said this in the hearing of the sufferer, she would say, "Oh, heavens, no! At any rate, not *that!*" so emphatically, that I once gave way to wonder at her manner, in my father's presence, loud enough for him to overhear. "Why does your stepmother pitch it so strong?" said he, echoing my words. "Well, I'll tell you. She says she talks in her sleep, and doesn't want me to know all her secrets. I limit myself strictly to snoring, I believe—never utter a word, with a meaning or without!"

"I know about that," said Gracey. "At the Square. Bert said Miss Ev . . . I mean Aunt Helen——"

"Stick to Miss Evans, Chick!" said my father. "She *was* Miss Evans in those days. Quite correct."

"Well, then, Bert said Miss Evans used to talk in her sleep, and Bert knew if any one did."

"Very good then—there we are! If Miss Evans talked in her sleep, we may be pretty sure Mrs. Pascoe does. But Mr. Pascoe doesn't hear her, I'll answer for that."

"Bert used to lie awake," said I, "like five-and-twenty weasels. I know, because I used to hear them quarrelling about it, next day."

My father said with gravity:—"Are you sure you got the number right?"

I explained that the analogy of the weasels was not to be taken *au pied de la lettre*, being merely my rot. One weasel was enough, and would be just as wide awake as a regiment. But I could cite instances of Bert and Jemima becoming warm in discussion of expressions said to have been used by the latter during sleep—in fact, of their going at it hammer and tongs all the morning. The particular occurrence that came readiest to hand was once when Miss Evans denied as too absurdly impossible that she had said, “Not guilty, my Lord!” several times, being sound asleep; on the ground that at the moment of waking, a moment later, she had come out of a dream of hot-cross buns, which she had to wash her hands with instead of Windsor soap. “I remember that,” said I, “and lots of things like it; and Aunt Helen always stuck to it, that what one talked in one’s sleep must work in one’s dreams, and Bert was inventing.”

The reason I called her Aunt Helen was that I was not certain she would not hear. For she was on the sofa, reputed asleep in consequence of her last night’s vigil, and we were speaking low not to disturb her.

Gracey recollected the absurd dream of the soap, but could not remember anything about “Not guilty, my Lord!” My father merely said:—“Doesn’t sound very likely, but dreams are rum things.” I was going to narrate other instances of sleep-speech recorded by my sister Roberta of the then Miss Evans, when that lady started up on the sofa as one who wakes suddenly, crying out, and saying:—“Yes. What? Why did you wake me?” quite unreasonably. She anticipated something my father was going to say, with:—“No! I am *not* spoiling my night’s rest. I could sleep for a week after last night.”

I think that, with a little persuasion from my father, she said good-night, and retired, to inaugurate that week’s sleep, I suppose. I recollect no further, except that my father was very much *inquieté* about Jemima, saying he wished she would see Sir This-this, or Sir That-t’ther about this insomnia. It was wearing her out.

I feel sure that Mr. Whittaker, who was the cause of my recollection of this incident, would never have shown such a solicitude about *his* wife. In fact, the only light that Varnish ever threw upon his character in this connection goes all the other way. He was represented, when Mrs. Whittaker mentioned that she felt all bones—not a symptom to be trifled with, surely!—as awakening for one moment from his after-dinner nap, to say:—“Take a dose!” Which appeared to me unsympathetic, though it was cited

as an example of his sterling commonsense, and practical way of dealing with the difficulties of Life.

But not on this occasion. Varnish's references to Mr. Whitaker were earlier—were traditional, in fact, at the time. We did, nevertheless, converse about Jemima's sleeplessness, especially in relation to the worry—or worry, which I suppose is the same thing—that it caused my father. This writing about it brings back to me that I described this incident to her, and that she did not show the commiseration that I should have expected. In fact, she said, rather abruptly:—"She only has herself to blame for it."

Now, Varnish knew that Jemima and I had, as I expressed it, "made it up"—without particularizing what it was that was made up—and that her own Christian forgiveness had hung fire. At least, that is how I accounted for her seeming to speak to herself rather than to me when she said this. I tried to say a word in extenuation of Jemima, with whom I was by this time on very good terms. "Don't be so crusty, Varnish dear," said I. "I'll be hanged if I can see how Jemima's to blame, any more than——" At which point I suddenly felt that what my speech was on the way to was not a thing to speak in cold blood—or warm, for that matter.

But Varnish would not let me off. "Any more than who?" said she.

I could have backed out, I suppose. But it would have been sheer poltroonery. So I said:—"Well, then, the Governor, if you will have it!"

"Oh, Master Jackey, your pa!" The words were few, but if Varnish had talked like the people in the end-chapters of novels, where the plots are explained, she could not have said more. I retracted everything, not without using the golden bridge of a Pickwickian sense, or some equivalent thereof. Varnish, however, readily forgave. "You took me wrong, Master Jackey," she said, "to fancy I could blame your pa." She was so contrite and hurt that she felt about—so I thought—for some excuse for a compensating leniency to her old *bête noire*. "And for your stepmar, my dear, we must place our hopes, and rely. If I'm wrong, I'm wrong. Never you mind nothing I say. Such things wasn't meant for boys."

I cannot remember any talk later than this one with Varnish, into which Jemima entered as a culprit on account of her marriage with my father. So I hope dear old Varnish felt more leniently towards her before she died.

As for my stepmother herself, I really have very little fault to find with her—indeed, the only definite indictment I can bring against her is that she obdurately refused to see either Sir This-this or Sir That-t’other, or to take any reasonable measures against her insomnia. If she had ever followed any advice at all, and given any treatment a fair trial, I can understand that she might have rejected it on its merits. But to combine rebellion against all experience with reckless and dangerous sporadic remedies, recommended by quack advertisements and offered for sale by any and every apothecary—this did seem to me at the time, and does still, a most ill-judged and in a certain sense selfish practice. It implied indifference to a pain and discomfort she occasioned my father, to which she *may* have been honestly blind, of course. I don’t believe she was. She was dishonestly blind, managed to shut her eyes to it—dishonestly deaf, for both Gracey and I urged upon her that even if medical attention could do her no good, it would be an immense relief to her husband’s mind to know that the best had been done that was to be found for her. I do not feel severely censorious about her conduct now, having since then had fifty years of opportunity to observe how rarely the sufferer puts the mind of bystanders at ease by accepting medical experience, his own case being always unlike previous cases. Still, I am surprised that she should have made no concession to my father’s anxiety. She might at least have interviewed Æsculapius, even if she threw his medicines away.

As to those panaceas which Jemima always bought a trial sample of whenever she saw a new label in a Chemist’s and Druggist’s, on the counter with the toothbrushes and nail-scissors. Their name was Legion, and their bottles were no use for anything but their First Love—if one may borrow that simile to indicate their first contents, described on undetachable labels or with ineradicable enamels; or embossed upon the glass, and perfectly blatant about the Nemesis in store for their imitators. But I believe they were only encouragements to imagination, and perfectly inoperative and harmless, though they were usually thirteen-pence-halfpenny. For which last fact I can only say God forgive the patentees and the Patent Office.

There were some, however, which were not harmless, but deadly; notably, Formodyne, or Dynoform—I forget which, and I am even uncertain about both. Either will do, for now—say Formodyne. The fiendish deep blue bottle, with embossed letters and a poison label, must have made its first appearance at The Retreat about this time. For I remember my father examining it with



suspicious eyes, saying:—"What's this new abomination, Helen? I can't have you taking stuff in blue bottles, with 'Poison' on them." And my stepmother replying:—"That stuff? Oh—I shan't take that! I only bought it because I had to buy something, when Mr. Modicum had been so obliging about the cat. I shan't take it. Give it to me and I'll have it thrown away." My father weakly surrendered it. But he had not seen the last of it.

Everything brings something else back! I had quite forgotten that cat and Mr. Modicum the Apothecary, who so obligingly poisoned it for our Cook, who objected to giving a shilling to The Dust to take it away, on Humanitarian grounds; as they—or it—would have thrown it in the river, tied to a brickbat. Whereas Mr. Modicum guaranteed that his poison would give no pain at all, and undertook to poison it himself. No one knew anything about Physiological Laboratories in those days, so no one doubted Mr. Modicum's intention to poison this cat. However, he was as good as his word in one particular, I doubt not. That cat's pain was not due to that poison.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

I FIND myself thinking very little as I write this of the knack, or faculty, which during my active life of manhood supplied me with an occupation and the sinews of War. Probably this is because I still think of caricature as a thing quite outside Art; and even now account the latter a sacred Cult, the Priesthood of which is only open to a privileged few. That view was the accepted correctitude in my time; and still lives, I believe, among a select circle of devotees, who regard photography much as a French Royalist regards Republicanism—an ephemeral fancy, of a rather long day!

Even now, I cannot bring myself to think that the camera has driven a coach-and-six through any Art that is not purely optical. I can see that the end has come of a lucrative profession—the production of pictures absolutely without invention—simply because snapshots are better. But I cherish a hope that there is still a day to come for the Artist who has something to say, in spite of my old friend 'Opkins's condemnation of what he called littery Art. He learned this phrase very many years after the date I am writing of, and his use of it made me feel that the group called the Fates in the Parthenon Sculptures, that were in front of us at the moment, had had its day, and might go. But this passed, and Phidias lived again as soon as Time had helped me to forget 'Opkins. This, however, has little or nothing to do with the point I have wandered from.

Caricature, to wit. I cannot say exactly when I found out this knack, or faculty. I only know that I never ranked it as Art. Art was when you had a moddle. 'Opkins said so. I may, or may not, have left behind in these miscellanea a statement that I made an imaginary sketch, when my sister Ellen's little eldest, Polycarp—my father christened him Polly Tittlebat afterwards—inaugurated the long perspective of clerical babies which made their appearance later, one at a time. Anyhow, I *did* make such a sketch, with ink and a crowquill; and very funny it was, though I say it that shouldn't!

'Opkins's verdict was confirmed, for only two views were ex-

pressed about it; one, that the viewster hoped I should not be led away from the serious study of Art by this dangerous and seductive rival; the other, seeking rather to know why I continued to kneel at the feet of the former, when the latter seemed so well-disposed towards taking me to her bosom. The question of which charmer was to enchain me must have been raised for the first time on the occasion of this sketch, as I remember very clearly Mrs. Walkinshaw's verdict on the subject. I can see her reception of the sketch—a condescension as towards the trivial side of Art; an indulgence of human weakness. I am aware that she takes her seat on our sofa to examine the drawing, tendered for her inspection as a portrait of the Mona branch of our family. “And has our Young Artist—our coming Correggio—actually contrived to portray his sister and her truly sacerdotal husband from Memory? That is, indeed, marvellous. . . . No, dear Mrs. Pascoe—NOW WAIT!—and let me get out my eyes, which have slipped to the bottom of the bag! I—must—look—at—this . . . deliberately. Who can say that Our Young Artist is not a Second Reynolds?” She recovered a wandering *pince-nez*, and devoted her soul to inspection.

I felt rather deceptive, and that it was inhospitable to hoax one's visitors—even Walkey, whom I hated! Indeed, I felt a sort of relief when the good lady signalized the advent of illumination—not with a war-whoop certainly, but with some sort of whoop; say a peace-whoop fraught with amazement, protest, and a keen appreciation of humour. I feel that if I were German, I could tell my fellow Teutons in one word.

“Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh-oh-h-h-h-h—oh!” The last a short, compacted protest-snap. “No-no, don't take it away. I must see *every line*. And did Correggio really unbend to do this? Oh, but it's *exactly* like the Reverend Gentleman.”

I remarked, appeased by flattery, that I was satisfied with my own portrayal of the Archbishop's umbrella. It wasn't half bad. Gracey said it was perfectly lovely.

Mrs. Walkinshaw could not see, off-hand, who was referred to. “The Archbishop?” said she. “Oh—Archbishop of Canterbury, of course! My dear!—young men will say *anything*. Absolutely anything. And that—that!—is your sweet, your lovely sister Ellen. My Elaine! Oh, brothers, brothers! And the long perspective of little children!” She melted away in a paroxysm of appreciation.

Some insight had to be shown, in confidence with Jemima, over the heads of us juveniles, into the technical absurdity of so huge

a family. That done, Mrs. Walkinshaw struck a higher note. "But, after all," said she, "this is trifling." She went on to recall the fact that even the most admirable fooling should not be our Life-Object. I borrow her expression. Nevertheless, as long as I kept before me the Image of True Art, as a Beacon, I might safely gratify the sense of humour which evidently, in my case, welled from every pore. In fact, to fail in doing so would be to fly in the face of the manifest intentions of the Almighty, and might get me into difficulties in high quarters.

I don't know whether this homily of Walker's had any influence with me. It may have acted in support of a conviction that I had, that I owed it to my father to prove that he had not done unwisely in allowing me to adopt the Image of True Art as a beacon. It would never do to turn aside to follow this Jack-o'-Lantern's farthing rushlight; and neglect the cult of real Art, with moddles. The collective wisdom of all my advisers in my family agreed on this verdict, and I kept my eyes dutifully on the aforementioned Beacon, and blundered on through the mire of Education; never, so far as I can recollect, receiving an intelligible instruction on any point.

My fellow-students at the Academy did not support my family's decision, with the exception of 'Opkins. "The leadin' idear of Art," said he, "is seriousness, and the 'ole duty of the Student is to keep that end in voo, and foller up. The Student of Art who loses sight of his Mission may every bit as well shut up. Cuttin' jokes is not the Mission of the Artist." It is fair to say that I did not hear this myself. It was repeated to me by a reprobate of the name of Bartholomew whose nature was emphatically not serious. He was, in fact, given up to dramatic recitations and songs, which were considered equivocal, or unequivocal, according to the straitness of the considerant's lacing—an expression which impresses me with the liberty the unread writer enjoys. He reported to me the above reflections of 'Opkins, and I straightway drew a portrait of 'Opkins uttering them. I suspect that it was very funny indeed, by the appreciation it received when passed from hand to hand for inspection.

"I should chuck painting, if I were you," said Bartholomew, "and go in for black-and-white." And the student public expressed approval, saying that there were too many Artists by a long chalk—meaning thereby, real Artists, with studios. Nowadays things are changed, about a fortieth part of the present Christian Era having elapsed unobserved since then. That chalk has doubled, trebled, quadrupled its length; and a shorter chalk—but one long

enough in all conscience—is metaphorically justified to express the superfluity of unreal Artists without Studios; Artists who can do Art in a common room, one understands. And all through the last thirty years or so of this epoch, Art Schools have germinated and Art teachers have multiplied, Art Educators fostered by Art Education, each one the fruitful instructor of a hundred more, until no house is complete without its Studio. But nobody wants pictures.

Just about the time of which I am writing an Artist of any ability at all who never sold a picture was looked upon as a butt of the exceptional malignity of Fate. Such a one's friends were never tired of wondering why a certain lack of interest in Bubble's work, or Squeak's, should doom those capable and painstaking artists to monotonous neglect, considering the raptures a vulgar and superficial Public surrendered itself to over the shocking daubs of Nip and Tip and Gobble and Popple! Bubble was a stoopid feller in himself, and everybody knew that Squeak's poverty of imagination was enough to stand in any man's way, but if you came to that, how about the other instances cited? No—the fact that neither Bubble, who could draw, beyond dispute, nor Squeak, who was no mean colourist, could either of them get a dealer to so much as look at their pictures, could only be accounted for as a freak of the fickle goddess of Fortune. Whereas nowadays nobody ever thinks it necessary to wonder at anything *except* a sale.

Certainly a hazy idea stirs in my mind that Squeak and Bubble would have looked upon taking to book-illustration as a confession of failure. Memory may be at fault, or may be biassed by some conspicuous chance instances, of which I have let slip the details. But my efforts to account to my Self for the repugnance I felt to crying off Real Art, and utilizing my faculty for pen-skill and pencil-craft, need some backing. I find it in recollections of expressed opinion, that to resort to black and white illustrations would be a falling off from a high ideal of Life—the ideal incorporated in The Artist's portrait of himself, with a palette on his thumb that looks as if you would get all over orange vermilion if you touched it, and a most masterly beginning on the easel. How well one knows his thoughtful brow, his penetrating gaze, his cultivated neglect of the human hair-brush! Fancy that great being climbing down, and devoting himself to humorous caricature, with a quill pen or lead pencil!

I get a little backing also from a clear memory of a thought that haunted me, that I was bound to justify my father's yielding to my professional bias. I talked to Gracey on these lines, in the hope



that she would encourage a secret wish on my part to "chuck" Academical education and discover something more fraught with colour and excitement—some road at least that would lead visibly somewhere. To my disgust, Gracey refused to accept my suggestion that she should press me to do so against my will. That was really what I wanted—advice to struggle against this mad determination of mine to climb the higher slopes of Parnassus, curb my ambitious aspirations, and submit my proud soul to endure the humble style and title of an illustrator. I had paved the way to this dissuasion by a hint of profits reaped by the groveller; while the Theban Eagle, for instance, pays the penalty of soaring by a chronic emptiness of pocket.

But Gracey took no notice of my hints, and encouraged me in a most trying way not to be disheartened by the difficulties in my path. Patience and superhuman application were all that was needed for a success in Art, to include a world-wide fame and potentates struggling to become the possessors of one's immortal pictures. I was tired of work and wanted a holiday, that was all.

I was obliged to make believe that I was setting my teeth with a firmer determination than ever to storm Parnassus, and that my remarks had been dictated solely by my consciousness that I ought to be earning something.

"What nonsense!" said Gracey. "As if Papa had not said hundreds of times that it doesn't matter if you don't earn a penny for the next ten years! Besides, why shouldn't you show some of your funny little quick sketches to . . . to the proper people, and see if they can't make use of them?"

"That's an idea," said I, consoled. "I might just as well have a shy, as not. But I shall tell the Governor."

"Why, of course tell the Governor! Why not?" This was the merest chat, which I should have forgotten if Gracey had not said, a moment later, in an odd voice:—"Oh, Jackey!"

I looked up, and Gracey was pale—for no reason that I could fathom. "What is it?" said I.

"Oh, nothing!" said she. "I know nobody spoke."

"Nobody did," said I, feeling eerie. "What's the fun?" For a certain alarm in her voice seemed to me to call for bravado.

"Nothing, darling boy! Go on drawing. Draw more." I was at the time adding a sketch to a book merely full of grotesques, and we had been talking the while. "What's that? You must know by this time." I replied that the figure in question was a Duke, but that I couldn't say where he was Duke of.

"Why is he up in a tree?" said Gracey.

"He's talking to a bird."

"What sort of bird?"

"I don't know. A tree-bird. Any bird. I say, Gracey——"

"What, Jackey darling?"

"What made you sing out just now?"

"Did I sing out?"

"Well—half out. What made you say nobody spoke?"

"Because nobody spoke. All the same I felt"—here Gracey dropped her voice as for speech about the dead—"I felt exactly as I should have felt if I had heard him speak close to us, now."

"What—Cooky?"

"Why, of course! It was just after you said you should tell Papa . . . about the idea, you know. I felt exactly as I should have felt if he had said, 'Don't be an ass, little Buttons!' here, quite close to us. Only of course I *heard* nothing."

"No—because there wasn't anything to hear." Nevertheless, I recall that I proceeded, as it were, to justify myself against a misconstruction that might have been placed on my words by the speaker who had never spoken. I was a little hurt that it would have been so exactly what Cooky would have said if he had been there to say anything. Of course I never should have dreamed of doing anything without speaking to the Governor first, except to give him a pleasant surprise. Then I felt nettled with myself for taking to heart words that might have been spoken, but were not. So much so that I almost resented Gracey's detecting my pique, and saying:—"It wasn't real, you know, Jackey darling."

I suppose this to have been in late Autumn or early Spring, as I recollect sitting by the fire with Gracey, after it became too dark to draw Dukes, talking of Cooky and the days gone by. He had been dead a couple of years or more, then.

"I wonder," said I, "what he would have said about my going on. Going on with Real Art, I mean."

Gracey made no reply, beyond, "Silly boy!" and accommodating my head on her lap. For I was lying on the hearthrug, at her feet.

"I wonder," I repeated, "would he have said the same—the same as just now?"

"He didn't say it just now."

"Well—you know what I mean. The same he didn't say just now."

"Don't be an ass, little Buttons!' Yes—that is what he would have said." Then I think we agreed, she and I, that there was no need to give up "Real Art" merely because of an excursion into illustration-making for books or periodicals. As to which

should have the greater share in my future, that was Destiny's lookout. The future might shape itself.

Therefore it was that I said to my father at the next convenient opportunity given by an evening conclave:—"I say, Pap, Bartholomew says there's no end of money to be made out of illustrations."

"What is the date of your authority? When did Bartholomew write?"

"He's not an authority. He's a chap."

My father puffed tranquilly at his pipe, with his eyes affectionately fixed on me, and enjoyed a phase of amusement before he said:—"Expressions are funny things. I find I accept yours in spite of the obvious fact that a human creature may be both a chap and an authority." He considered yet a little more, and added:—"It's curious, but I can't shut my eyes to it, that Bartholomew—not being an authority, but being a chap—presents himself to my mind as a fellow-student of yours at the Academy."

"Why, of course he is! Why should he be anything else?"

"Many other people are. But let's take him for granted, and hear what he says about no end of money."

"To be got by making illustrations. That's what he says. I was thinking there would be no harm in having a shy at it."

"Have the shy by all means. . . . But, Jackey boy——"

"I know what you're going to say."

"What?"

"That I mustn't neglect painting—real work. Well—I won't."

"I wasn't going to say exactly that. But I must confess I don't see why the shy should involve any serious neglect of painting. No, my dear boy, I was going to say don't be disappointed if nothing comes of it. In the course of my life I have heard of so many things there was no end of money to be made in. But they have all had one quality in common."

I had brightened up at the beginning of this, but felt misgiving towards the end, and asked somewhat hesitatingly what it was—this quality in common.

"What was it?" said my father. "Why, other people had always got the money, not the people who told me. However, have the shy, by all means, and we shall see what comes of it. How are we going to set about it?"

I explained the tactics I proposed to adopt. The effect of the scheme was that Bartholomew should write a humorous poem, and I should make what I called thumbnail marginal notes—little sketchlets of intense appropriateness—to each verse. That

the result should be offered as a contribution to the new humorous journal, *Momus*, and the proceeds divided equally between the poet and the illustrator. Bartholomew would call at the Office and leave it himself. He had the cheek. I hadn't.

"It doesn't matter which," said my father. "The result would be the same. That is, if I am rightly informed as to how these things are worked. Billions of contributions are offered to journals. These are examined by tens of thousands of illiterate clerks at low salaries, who clear out what they think rubbish, and throw it into waste-paper baskets of prodigious size. Thousands of persons of average capacity study what is left, and throw what they reject into much smaller waste-paper baskets, and so on. At last only a few hundred *jeux-d'esprits* and thoughtful monographs remain, and these are examined by persons of penetrating intellect, who pass on a final selection to the Editor. I think the system a wrong one, myself."

"Which way ought it be done?"

"The other way round. The penetrating intellect is required to say what should be quashed outright. Any fool can decide on publishing what will be forgotten on its merits in a day. Anyway, if you send them your drawings, you'll never see them again. Your friend's rhymes don't matter. He can keep a copy."

My father's little lecture had a purpose behind it. He went on to say that he had heard that an old college fellow of his had started a new weekly, of a comic sort, and that this might be this identical *Momus*. If so, he could write to him about me, and send him some of my drawings. That would be much more likely to get attention to them.

On inquiry next day of my friend Bartholomew the identity of this editor was established, and some correspondence with him led to my supplying some dramatic initial letters, which were approved. They were the precursors of a long development of grotesque woodcuts, for which I became well enough known in my day, and which supplied me with resources in proportion to my industry in producing them until—well—until I was compelled to discontinue its exercise. If I live long enough, I shall come to the telling of that.

As to poor old Real Art, my first love, it must not be supposed that I discarded her altogether. On the contrary, I kept the fiction alive for a considerable time by beginning new "studies" twice a month—I think that was the rule—and neglecting them twice a month with steadfast punctuality. I had to

begin them, or I could not have been thwarted in my desire to complete them, but it was entirely a matter of form. I had reason to believe—so far as being told anything by Bartholomew was a reason for believing it—that 'Opkins shed tears over my defection. He said, according to my informant:—"Parseoc ain't the first by a many that's neglected the 'igher objects of Art for the Dagon of Commerce. I 'old, myself, with makin' rumination secondary, and on no account proarstitootin' gifts above the average to a fixed salary." This was a reference to an offer I had accepted of a very small rumination, or remuneration, for a stated output of vignettes or initials delivered punctually on Monday morning. I think Bartholomew exaggerated 'Opkins's style. I have noticed that Satire is apt to exaggerate its provocations; and that when we seek to hold our fellow-men up to ridicule, we dress him grotesquely in a garb of our own devising. When we condemn him to death, we leave his crimes unexaggerated. This is owing to our confidence in a hereafter. He will be properly seen to—never fear! We hang the man, and the Devil does the rest.

I think 'Opkins held off from me from this date, accounting me no longer worthy to be called his pal. I understood that he spoke of me as a backslider from the true fount of Art, and destined to reap an inevitable Nemesis. These metaphors were obscure, but Bartholomew, who told me how 'Opkins had described me, and supplied his own commentary, saw no reason to suppose his heart was not in the right place. It would, he said, make one inclined to quarrel with the decrees of Providence, that a man should not only have been deliberately created with a displaced heart, but should have been compelled to be 'Opkins into the bargain. He added, however, that he never gave way to his combative inclinations in this direction, being a prudent man, awake to the fact that one's attitude towards Omnipotence should be subject to the consideration of which side one's bread was buttered. He was really, if the truth was known, a time-server, and had no doubt that beyond the tomb he should be an Eternity-server. For where was the use of trying conclusions with a Deity who was omnipotent by hypothesis, was not open to argument, and had the authorized version of the Scriptures at his finger's ends, and was besides without any sense of Humour whatever. All the same, he said, it was an Awful Choice that was placed before us, poor tremblers at the Seat of Judgment; considering that so far as he could see, Heaven and Hell were six of the one and half-a-dozen of the other. In fact, he would



personally prefer the latter, because of the company, more especially since he understood from Liberal members of the Church of England that it was quite an open question whether Dissenters went to Hell.

It has been said that amusement could not be derived from incongruities if it were not for the prior acceptance of an absurdity as a reality by the mind. Bartholomew's mind had been prepared for such amusement by his religious education. He had to thank two Evangelical Aunts for the gratification he derived from ridiculing the early materials of Salvation by Faith that they had afforded him.

'Opkins may have contributed *something* to the feeling I had that it would never do to forsake Real Art for such an ephemeral employment as woodcuts in periodicals. Mrs. Walkinshaw's attitude, on the contrary, made me feel that if it were not for my family nothing would give me greater pleasure than to throw up the Academy for good, and addict myself solely to my new vocation. For I hated Walkey, and my soul was in rebellion against all her rules of life and moral precepts.

There was a topic the good lady was never tired of dwelling on—the impression my first visit to Italy was going to produce on me. My whole inner being, she announced was going to be hushed—silenced—in the Living Presence of a Mighty Past. I didn't feel at all sure that I should be pleased at this, but I went so far as to say that I supposed that sort of thing did make a chap sit up and think. In fact, I had heard a chap say as much; a chap, that is, who had himself sat up and thought. I certainly recall that I did mention that 'Opkins, whose ideal of Art Education was the Royal Academy Schools for ever and ever, had rebuked the chap and denounced study in Italy as an 'oller sham.

"The Ideal of Art-Earrestness," said Mrs. Walkinshaw, sitting upright on our sofa with her eyes shut, to emphasize the fact that she was soaring above 'Opkins, "is to be found in Michelangelo. To work in Italy, at the very shrine of his achievements, is to partake of his atmosphere. We must be content with nothing less than a course of study in the very shadow of the Sistine Chapel."

I feel certain that the emphasis which faulty oratory threw on the word shadow made my stepmother's mind reel, and bred an idea in it that the advantages of studentship in Rome were circumscribed and localized, as suggested. For she said, deprecatingly:—"Perhaps we shall not find an empty Studio." And

Gracey made the point clearer by asking pointblank how big the shadow was.

Mrs. Walkinshaw was nearly through a laugh before she opened her eyes with the exclamation:—"Oh, but you are such *literal dears!* Fancy 'how big'! Our *dear* Gracey!" She endeavoured to entangle my sister in an embrace, but Gracey got cleverly away, falling back behind me as a support. Then Mrs. Walkinshaw cleared up the position, saying briefly:—"I spoke metaphorically." She then resumed the subject with a species of rapture, clasping her lavender kid gloves to say:—"Oh, but I see it. A Studio in Rome, and receptions! Oh, my darling Gracey—how small we *shall* feel!" My memory must be at fault here. It must have created an image of this excellent lady endeavouring to dodge round me, to gloat over or otherwise gushily molest Gracey. I can't remember whether Gracey escaped, or fell a victim and had to be coiled round. I remember distinctly making drawings to this effect next day, and it may be that my drawings, remaining in my memory, have substituted a false effect for the reality.

Further than this, I can only add to my disjointed recollections an image of the patient forbearance of my father, whose love for me bore me out in this new departure of illustration-making, as I believe it would have done in any new course that had taken my fancy—even an absurd one—in the belief that I should one day steady down into some reasonable and perhaps profitable vocation. And if I did not, would he not be able to leave enough to his survivors to put absolute poverty out of the question?

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

WHAT a long time my father held on at Somerset House after that narrow escape, just after my mother's death, of throwing up his situation prematurely and losing his pension! He might have resigned, and claimed it, many years before he did so. But the fact was that he was on that occasion obeying an impulse against the grain, and letting his respect for my mother's wish run counter to his own prudence, and perhaps to his reluctance to say good-bye to the post he had filled for so many years. He was one of those people who think that everything ought to go on for ever, and would do so, if it were not for the difficulty-mongering of every one else.

As a matter of fact, I had *dégringolé* from my Higher Art Instincts—Mrs. Walkinshaw's expression—and been at work as an illustrator for some months at the time of the incidents which led to my father's farewell to Inland Revenue. These two words are still so familiar to me that I cannot really understand their meaning. I can, of course, assign to them mechanically the interpretation that my mind has received since childhood; but that's another thing. I caress the idea of my infancy, that they expressed a great something that never could be known to me, and can reconstitute *pro hac vice* the frame of mind which associated them with what I was told was a Revenue Cutter, at the seaside. My father's avocation was Inland, that was all. This vessel could cut only Revenues that were met out at sea; as fish, sea-gulls, or otherwise. But both forms of Revenue were beyond me, and I accepted them without inquiry.

This passive acceptance in childhood of a Government Department that I could not in the nature of things know anything about must have clung to me through life. For more than once, when I had occasion to seek my father out at Somerset House, for the delivery of a message or what not, I felt unable to approach its mysterious interior in the same spirit as that in which I should have explored any other great Institution in London, even the Mansion House. Surely the latter ought to inspire awe. Yet when I went there once—to get the Lord Mayor's name and seal appended to a Colonial document that refused to be content with

anything less—I trod the sacred precincts without misgiving, even with confidence. It was quite otherwise at Somerset House. There my whole soul felt hushed by the thought that I was *here*—here in the very place that had co-existed with me from all time, that I had thought of as an unvarying background to my father, but whose interior was as unknown to me as any Thibetan shrine; and whose purpose was inscrutable, though guaranteed unimpeachable by my father having something to do with it. I wonder whether any other than myself ever had so strange a relation with another Institution as mine with Somerset House—was ever conscious of such a one as a Fact, without details, through so long a term of years; and yet made no inquiry, as I made none, that would have brought it down from the realm of almost abstract ideas to the concrete conditions of a Public Office, where you can go in at the wrong door, and ask your way a great many times, and have to wait a very long time for answers? Also, where there are places you can take a seat in till Mr. So-and-so is disengaged, and would you like to see this morning's *Times*?—where your letter that introduces you and explains your business is caught in a whirlwind and borne away, and you think you are lost in Chaos till the young man comes back and says Mr. So-and-so will be able to see you presently; where pigeon-holes have broken out in eruptions on the walls, and classification seems to have become an irresistible habit, like Alcoholism. I am only mentioning a few of the characteristics of such places in the concrete, at random, to emphasize my recollection of the idea. Somerset House, as it was first instilled into my baby mind, and was retained there, as an abstraction, till well on into manhood. That idea had nothing in common with these banalities. It was above them—extensive, continuous, and dignified, but quite above functions and duties and objects and things, that mortal men fulfil, or don't.

It was my father himself who first found out the fact that the time had come for his resignation. And the incident that set him a-thinking first over that fact was one that I still remember well; I suppose because subsequent events made me recall as much as I could of it, to illuminate them if possible. It happened in this wise, one afternoon in the Summer when I was returning from a sketching expedition.

Gracey was just passing in at the garden gate when I turned into the lane, and she did not see me coming. So I had to knock at the door independently. She knew my knock and opened to me, having stopped to look at the directions of letters. I heard

her tell Raynes, while I was still outside, that it was only me and she needn't come. Why she thought it needful to stop Raynes's career I don't know. Exercise was good for Raynes.

"Any letters?" said I, for no reason. For I saw there were none for me. One does see, very quickly, the absence of one's own name from a post.

"Nothing of any interest," said Gracey. "They're all for Papa and Aunt Helen." But she kept on looking at one of them.

I also looked at each in turn, to verify this. Again, without reason. For I trusted Gracey's word. She kept on looking at the one she held. "What's the matter with that one?" said I.

"Only that it's so *odd*," said she. "Look at it, and see what you think! . . . Now—*isn't it odd?*"

I cast about for a negative attitude, but could find nothing better than:—"I don't see anything odd in that. Some chap's handwriting is like the Governor's. Well!—lots of people write exactly alike."

"No, Jackey dear—that's just what they *don't* do. Every one writes his own way, and nobody else's." I pooh-poohed this, which indeed may be a little overstated, and went upstairs.

But I had only just reached the landing when my father's latch-key clicked in the door. "There's the Governor coming!" said I, over the stair-rail. "You ask him if *he* thinks it odd." I waited to hear, though; for I did not feel so very sure, after all.

"What's the rumpus?" said my father, coming in. "Who thinks what? What do we think? Any letters?" The first questions called for no answer. They only emphasized general communion.

Gracey answered the last. "Three for you—two for Aunt Helen—none for me—none for Jackey! Who's this from?"

"Why?"

"Because it's so like your writing." Gracey handed the odd letter to my father, who opened it, assenting to her view after glancing at the direction, with the remark:—"So it is. Some chap's done it for a lark. It seems to me a very mild lark." I fancied that he seemed nettled at the presumption of this correspondent, and that he opened the letter with something like impatience. A glance at the signature, which came foremost, provoked a sudden exclamation:—"Well—but—but . . . I wrote this . . . I wrote this yesterday." Then he turned to the direction on the envelope, saying in great bewilderment:—"But what—but why?" Then he collected himself, to say emphatically:—"Some



stupid mistake! Mine, I daresay! Yes, probably mine!" My stepmother's knock at the street-door broke into any possible explanation, and I thought my father seemed relieved to be able to thrust this mysterious epistle into his breast-pocket, and to say to her that it was, "Oh, nothing!" with such an obvious wish to extinguish the topic, that Gracey and I were silent about it.

Nevertheless, Gracey came into my room, and sat on the bed while I changed my boots, all about this letter. "What was it upset Papa so?" said she. "Because *he* was upset, Jackey, and it's no use saying he wasn't."

Then I began to see that there was a problem awaiting solution. My first contribution to it was:—"Somebody put the Governor's letter in the wrong envelope."

"I don't care about the letter," said Gracey. "What I want to know about is the envelope. Who directed it?"

"The Governor, of course!"

"Yes—but why? People don't direct letters to themselves."

"Oh yes, they do, though!" I plunged into a maze of improbable supposition, of a person at a place of business who had left the address of an unknown correspondent at home, and whom to make it more sure that his answer should be forwarded when he returned in the evening, and not forgotten, had done as my father appeared to have done. It was ingenious, but did not bear examination.

Gracey took the most salient point. "If it was that," said she, "why was Papa surprised?"

I began, "Well—you see! . . ." weakly, and got deeper in the mire. So Gracey laughed at me and called me a silly boy, which I deserved. Then she ran away to get ready for dinner.

I heard no more of the letter until my father and I were smoking in the study after dinner. Then he referred to it, as I knew he would, without any suggestion on my part that he should do so.

"Now, Master Jackey," said he, "I want you to turn your powerful mind to the solution of a practical problem. What do you make of that?" He held out the empty envelope to me as he spoke, and I felt as I took it from him somewhat as a superstitious person feels who is offered a thing warranted bewitched, and fights shy of handling it. I pretended indifference, however, and looked inside it for the letter. "There's nothing in it," said I. "No letter, I mean."

"Precisely," said he. "I sent the letter on, to get it off my conscience. Also to catch the next post; Mr. Westrop will get his letter, only twenty-four hours late. It's not a hanging mat-

ter. But how about the envelope? What do we make of that? Who wrote it?"

"Why," said I, seeing no escape, "you wrote it. Or some beggar who writes exactly like you, anyhow!"

"I wrote it," said my father, gravely. "And the question is—why? *Why* did I write it?"

Of course this question, and the way he waited for an answer, was embarrassing. I think I changed colour and hesitated. "Didn't you know why?" said I. I could not say:—"Don't you know why?" It would have been rude.

"I did not even know that I did it. It was done unconsciously. I could understand writing my own name instead of some one else's, if the first syllables were the same. Then if one forgot to go on thinking about what was to come next, one's hand would not write what was to come next; one's hand would write what it was most accustomed to write. That does happen. But——"

"But what?"

"But to write Nathaniel Pascoe, Esquire, instead of Thomas Truman Westrop, Esquire—just consider! Thomas Truman Westrop . . . Thomas Truman Westrop. . . ." He went on repeating the name, as though to catch some point of resemblance to his own, that would furnish a clue to his aberration.

I turned fatuously to the task of discovering a resemblance between the names. I traced each letter of Nathan complete, to my surprise, but was upset by the third syllable. I gave it up, with the remark that I was afraid that cock wouldn't fight.

"He's a very poor bird," said my father, and went on smoking thoughtfully. As for me, I felt that I had really nothing to say, and held my tongue.

Presently my father said, as though his cogitations had borne fruit:—"One thing is pretty clear—this may happen again!"

"Suppose it does!"

"Suppose it does?" You're a nice son and heir for a public servant. However—I'll tell you. That letter was written to Thomas Truman Westrop—whoever he is; I don't know—to tell him that his letter would be laid before the Board. And it doesn't matter a brass farthing whether he gets it today or tomorrow, or next week. But the one I wrote just after that was to assure the Secretary of State that I would wait upon him next Monday as appointed, and bring all the necessary documents. That happened to be a reply by bearer, to make the thing a fixture. But it *might* have gone by post, for all I can see. Now, suppose I had sent *that* letter to Thomas Truman Westrop—who's a man

with a grievance—he might have avenged himself on the Official World by throwing it in the fire. I think I am not exaggerating when I say that that would have been a pretty kettle of fish, seeing what the alternative appointment was.”

“Couldn’t you have made it hot for what’s—his—name, Thomas Truman Westrop, if he burnt your letter?”

“My dear boy, I’m glad you’re an Artist, not a detective. However should I know that he had burnt my letter?”

I reflected, and found no answer. I could only see my way to a vague optimism. “But no harm has come of it, so what does it matter?”

“No harm has come of it this time,” he replied, with even more of gravity in his manner. “Indeed, some good may have come of it, for I think I can make sure that it never will happen again. We shall see.” I said no more.

This incident had a good deal to do with my father’s decision, made shortly afterwards, to resign his position at Somerset House; although, so far as he assigned reasons for doing so publicly, no reference was made to anything but his long term of service, and his feeling that old stagers should clear out and make way for the rising generation. This, however, was some months later.

He took me quite into his confidence; no one perhaps so thoroughly. For he told my stepmother as little as he could about the misdirected letter and the cause of his alarm. Indeed, although he told her of the incident—and this he could scarcely avoid doing, as she had come upon him at the moment of its occurrence—he did not inform her of the resolution he formed in consequence. He admitted that the curious misdirection implied something abnormal in his state of health, but laid it down to stomach, the optimist’s scapegoat.

To me he was quite explicit. When we were alone together a few evenings later, in the garden this time—this was in the Summer, and after-dinner smokes were frequently out of doors—he referred to the subject again.

“It’s the writing on the wall, my dear boy!” said he. “Only this time the same actor is cast for the part of Belshazzar and the Prophet. I shall burn out.” He was looking at the match he had just used to light his pipe, which was flickering on the ground at our feet.

“I shall burn out,” he repeated. “Without spitting and fizzing, I hope. It’s one of the quarrels I have with my Creator—whom I presume, without definite reason, to have been everybody’s else’s—that with all the unlimited resources of Omnipotence,

he could not contrive some less awkward and repulsive way of winding up Life than Death. And to make matters worse, one is decently interred. It is no use pretending that God did not make undertakers, because they have just as good a claim to be considered His Creatures as Members of Society."

I am pretty sure this is sound recollection, not plausible reconstruction. What I said in reply ignored the theology, as I was more interested in the prediction that had led to it. "But why burn out, Pap dear? Why more than any one else, I mean? We all burn out, I suppose sometime. . . . I say, Pap——!"

"What, for instance, Intelligent Offspring?"

"What *did* Dr. Scammony say?" For I knew he had been to consult the little man, but had so far only a very imperfect report of the medical verdict. "I don't believe he only said 'Diet.'"

"That's all that concerns the General Public. The remainder is shrouded in mystery. But it's no secret that he said I should see Rayson; or that I didn't twig, and said I never knew he was an Irishman. *He* twigged, and said:—'No—not reason, *Rayson*—Sir Alcibiades Rayson. He's the man for this sort of job' . . . I think it would be best that you should repeat nothing I say to your stepmamma, or perhaps to anybody."

"I shan't repeat a single word," said I, rather proud to know something more than the General Public, especially as my stepmother seemed to belong to it. "He's a Big Wig, I suppose?"

"As large a Wig as the subject admits of. . . . No—I can't see my way to a Baronetcy, in this connection!" He seemed to turn the advancement of this gentleman over in his mind, and to decide that knighthood met all the needs of the case; then resumed:—"However, I daresay I shall go and see him, for little Scammony's sake. He doesn't like the responsibility. If Sir Rayson puts me on charcoal, and forbids meat and fish and wine and eggs and butter and cheese, I can remain on the charcoal in theory, and prey upon animals and vegetables *ad libitum* like Violante in the pantry, gnoring of a mutton-bone." My father seemed to derive great satisfaction from this prospect of surreptitious evasion of doctor's orders.

I got back to the main point. "But about the writing on the wall. Do you mean that . . . ?" I hung fire over saying the thing I meant.

He had no such scruples and accepted my meaning with perfect equanimity. "Mean that I shall die one day, and that the disorder I shall die of is identified? That was my meaning. It

would be infinitely more correct to make believe that I was immortal, as properly brought-up people do, in Christian communities. . . . What!—do you mean that they *don't*? Why, when someone near a hundred is on his deathbed, don't the newspapers say 'the worst is feared'? And people are 'not expected to live'—no one is ever so candid as to say he is expected to die. Really, the proverb 'Never say die' gets obeyed all round."

I said something about how words didn't count. But I don't think it meant anything.

"Well," said my father, cheerfully, "facts count, and I drove little Scammony into a corner, and made him speak as nearly plain as a human General Practitioner could be expected to do. He said that if I developed sundry symptoms, he, if he were I, would make my Will. I told him that if he were me, he would have done that years ago. We got a little perplexed over an obscure hypothesis."

"He wasn't so very plain, that I see. He only said *if* you developed . . . what was it?"

"I forget the exact name of the complaint. It doesn't matter. I long ago gave up paying the slightest attention to diseases' names. There are really only two sorts, those that kill, and those that permit of a *modus vivendi*. I prefer the first. The *modus* is never a comfortable one for their . . . client—suppose we say—however satisfactory to themselves. What fun it would be to be a pain in the head of somebody one hated! How one would come on, and get worse, and never yield to treatment!"

I don't believe he had forgotten the name of the complaint.

At another time I should have listened with pleasure to my father in this mood, as I always did. But the importance he had seemed to attach to that insignificant affair of the misdirection, and the fact that he had certainly paid Dr. Scammony a visit in consequence of it, lent weight to those unpleasant words of his about the "writing on the wall." Otherwise I might have thought them nothing but vague moralizing, suggested perhaps by the short-lived flame of that match on the gravel path. I did not feel any real alarm about him, because real danger, in the case of any one so intrinsically permanent as he, was impossible *per se*. Death lays his icy hand on Kings; but then they are public characters, and History has to be considered.

So I only felt a little passing discomfort at his reference to Daniel, and allowed my natural optimism to take its course. "You're all right, Pater dear!" said I. "You've only got not to develop—something with a Latin name. It *had* a Latin name,



I suppose?" I said this with a view to getting at the name, and asking questions of a young medical man I had come to know, the brother of an Artist whom I met first at the Academy Schools.

"Not a Latin name this time," said my father. "Greek. It's just as easy not to develop a disease in Greek as in Latin, even when one knows as little Greek as I do. However, I know enough to know this was a Greek disease, not a Latin one. But it went in at one ear, and out at the other. . . . There—I've forgotten it!" He withheld the name, which was what I expected. As far as I know, it was never mentioned again between us. One is shy of giving its name to a disorder, in speech with its victim.

But some words he had used on the occasion of that misdirected letter hung in my head, and vexed me into asking their meaning pointblank. "Why did you say some good might come of the mistake on the letter?" said I.

"Some good? When did I say that?"

"At the time. You said you might make sure that it should not happen again."

"I shall, as far as business letters are concerned; unless, indeed, something happens before next Christmas. Private correspondence will have to take its chance, after that."

"How do you mean?" I asked, not because I had no guess, but as an expression of official ignorance. Because he had not then declared any definite intention.

"Next year, my dear boy, the Inland Revenue and I shall part company, except for periodical reminders of its existence which I shall receive in common with all persons with whom it is on visiting terms. It never forgets its old friends, though it scorns the poor and lowly." He tapped the ash out of his pipe and refilled it, after which he became less metaphorical. "I mean I shall resign, and retire on my pension. That misdirected letter did the job. It won't do to run the risk of blunders like that. I shall be in a state of constant anxiety until I know my last letter has been delivered to the proper person." This was a prosaic pause, between the old pipe and the new. A whiff of the fresh tobacco made him himself again. "And Scammony says I must, above all things, avoid anxiety. Unless I particularly want to develop those symptoms, to see what they are like! I don't think I care to do so. They seem uninteresting."

"Shall you tell . . . ?" I began.

"Your stepmamma? Why—no! At least, I shall tell her I mean to resign. But there are plenty of reasons for that. Thirty years is a good stretch of public service. She won't connect it

with the visit to Scammony. I shan't tell her anything for another six weeks. Time to forget a dozen doctors! Two per week."

I saw that, having said as much as he meant to say seriously, he was relaxing into his former tone. He was soon speculating as to whether, if Dr. Scammony had seen Belshazzar's tongue, he would have been able to check that monarch in his downward course, and enabled him to put on moral flesh enough to cut a better figure in the balance.

"Now mind, Master Jackey," said he as we wound up our garden smoke and went to join Jemima and Gracey in the drawing-room—they had a visitor who would not come out because of the night air—"now mind you don't say a word of this to either of them. They'll know all about it in time. Only I don't want them to know it yet, or they'll connect it with Belshazzar."

So I kept my own counsel, stimulated and supported by my sense of my important position of confidence. I did not even speak of it to Gracey.

But I needed the stimulus and support, for it became a little difficult to maintain the confidence, seeing that I was at best a bad hand at any sort of concealment. My stepmother developed suspicions about my father's reasons for paying a visit to Dr. Scammony, having only an imperfect knowledge of the affair of the misdirected letter; indeed, she had given very slight attention to it at the time. My father had, however, in an unguarded moment, let out about his visit to Bernard Street, having said heedlessly that he had been in the neighbourhood of "the Square" and had found it none too easy to restrain himself from going to see how it was looking. "I could just as easily have walked round that way," said he, "as waited for little Scammony, who broke his appointment; but I suppose it was just as well. It wouldn't have made me cheerful."

My stepmother looked up from the fashionable marriages in the Personal column of her newspaper, to say:—"You did not say you had been to Dr. Hammond! What on earth took you to Dr. Hammond?"

My father perceived his mistake, but no immediate chance of correcting it. He took refuge in a misprision of the obvious meaning of the question, and replied:—"A hansom cab. I've forgotten the number, but I formed a good opinion of the driver."

Gracey said "Why?" cutting across Jemima's:—"Nonsense about hansom cabs. You know perfectly well what I mean."

He preferred to answer Gracey, who seemed interested in the cab-driver. "Because when I gave him one and sixpence, he

said he wanted half-a-crown. I pointed out that the legal fare was a shilling, and he said he was quite aware of the fact, but that he wanted a half-crown for all that from natural cupidity, not as having any claim for it. He said:—"You ask any beggar of uncommonly moderate means if he don't want half-a-crown, and if he don't say yes he's a liar!" So I formed a good opinion of him, as he seemed to be truthful and clear-sighted."

"And, of course, you gave him the other shilling?" This was Gracey, while Jemima waited almost audibly for the end of this nonsense. It was not her sort. My father eluded the point of whether the cabman got the shilling—of course he *did* get it—by going back to the previous question—what on earth took him to Dr. Hammond's? "Well—anyhow!—the cab took me to Bernard Street. But I suspect you mean—why did I go?"

"Of course I meant why did you go! Why was it? Is anything wrong?"

"Nothing whatever. Never was better in my life." But my father was over-stating his case, and courting suspicion. I saw it in my stepmother's eye as she dropped the subject; dropped it as it were on the ground, and looked another way. Catechism was useless—so she evidently decided—and enlightenment had to be sought elsewhere. I had a prevision that "elsewhere" would be in my neighbourhood.

"Ask Jackey!" said Gracey, as I entered the drawing-room an hour later. It was on a Sunday morning, and she and Jemima were having a pre-Church chat, slightly tinctured with letter-writing.

"Ask Jackey what?" said I. "Only cut along quick, because I'm just going out."

My stepmother, as usual, good-looking and well in hand—her own hand—was not disposed to give way to coercion. "Not if you are in such a hurry. Another time will do quite as well." She took up the *Observer* and pretended to be interested in it.

"Do tell Aunt Helen what she wants to know, Jackey, and don't be silly!" Thus Gracey, causing me to take a chair ostentatiously, as one who anticipates a prolonged interview.

"I can't do any telling until she says what it is," said I, with aggressive meekness. But Aunt Helen was not well disposed towards concession under pressure. She addressed Gracey without taking her eyes off the *Observer*. "Never mind now, Gracey dear! Another time will really do just as well. Let him go now."

Gracey accepted this as tactics, making no comment. She took

upon herself the part of *parlementaire*. "Aunt Helen wants to find out," she said, "why Papa went to Dr. Hammond. Is anything the matter he isn't telling us about?"

As I did not know what he was telling them about—at least, officially—a way out of the difficulty seemed to present itself. "How should I know?" said I. But the question was not *bona fide*, and I was not clever at this sort of thing. I proceeded to develop embarrassment for myself, adding needlessly: "How do I know what he's told you?"

That was fatal. My stepmother laid the *Observer* down, saying to Gracey, exactly as if I had not been in the room:—"You see how it is, dear. There is something, and he *hasn't* told us!"

Gracey accepted any negligibility, making me feel that I wasn't wanted. "Suppose we were to go—us two—this afternoon, and call on Dr. Hammond. *He* would tell us."

Jemima flushed up quite angrily; and, indeed, this was very unusual with her—she was not given to changing colour. "Anything but that!" she exclaimed. And I think Gracey was as much surprised as I was. She looked quite puzzled for a minute at least. Then she said deprecatingly:—"But why not? He's a very old friend. And at any rate, he *knows*."

"Does he? Well, Gracey dear, since you think so much of him, you go and see him yourself. I shall certainly not go."

"Suppose you and I were to go and talk to him, Jackey. It couldn't do any harm—now, could it?"

I did not fancy this. I think I wanted to nurse my disbelief in my father's gloomy forecast about himself. So I said, with masculine importance, that the Governor wouldn't like that. My sister surrendered the point, rather as though she thought there might be truth in what I said.

"Of course not!" said our stepmother, who seemed to have become quite heated on the subject. "Your father would dislike it extremely. I cannot tell what possesses him to pin his faith on that absurd little G. P. But he does, and nothing I can say is of any use. The best thing you young people can do is to persuade him to see a Specialist—some man of standing—if he really suspects there is anything the matter. But do anyhow try to persuade him against that little humbug Hammond. If he comes down here to see him I shall simply leave the house." I don't think I ever saw Jemima so *emue* against any one.

Since our migration to Chelsea, my father's very old friend, Dr. Scammony—that is, Hammond—had remained his medical adviser, in spite of the low opinion Jemima had of his capabilities.



I never could understand on what this was founded. It was quite unimportant so long as my father continued a model of robust health; indeed, so long as one's medical adviser is not called on for advice, a night-bell and a thermometer for temperatures, as insignia, are all that is professionally necessary. Even so a submarine mine may do as well on cottonwool as on gun-cotton, as long as navigation goes another way. It is when one is called on to explode—or prescribe, in the doctor's case—that weakness of qualification is apt to show itself.

I suppose that *Jemima* was in the right when, after a grudging admission from my father that he had felt some uneasiness about his own health, she protested against his leaving it entirely in the hands of Dr. Scammony, and urged him to consult a specialist. My father was at least unconvincing when he replied that that was precisely what *Hammond* had said himself, and he should do nothing of the sort. It seemed such a *non-sequitur*. But I understand what he meant—that Dr. Scammony's advice was a sufficient proof of his professional integrity, which my stepmother had foolishly impugned, saying that he was an incompetent little prig, who only wanted to keep all the fees for himself. If she had been content to treat the question as one of medical skill only, and not mixed it up with another, of personal character, I believe my father would not have felt in honour bound to take up a defensive position. Gracey said about it, talking apart to me:—"Of course Papa sticks up for Dr. Scammony. He was sure to do so."

This was in the frequent, if not invariable, conclave held to discuss any matter of great public interest by myself, Gracey, and Varnish. For man and woman as we were by now, my sister and I still held firmly to the tradition that Varnish's presence, as an assessor or umpire, was an essential to the highest consideration of family concerns. If the *status quo* had lasted another ten years, I believe these debates would have still gone on, unchanged. For the weight of one's first and only nurse's authority is not a thing one's life parts with easily, and Varnish was a survival of the early days at the Square.

So that this speech, apart to me, of Gracey's about Dr. Scammony was no correction of what Varnish had just said about *Jemima*, but rather justified or confirmed it. We both knew that Varnish could not express opinions in cold blood when anything our stepmother had said was before the House. The speech she had just made was coloured by her sentiments towards her enemy, and both of us knew we might ignore these as mere com-



mon form. She had said:—"Some has their reasons, and some—they do without. And whether or not, Dr. Scammony—he's not in favour. Not with your stepmar. Your pa's contrariness itself to that." To which Gracey's answer, as recorded above, would have been no more than an obvious comment, had it not been for a certain hesitation of manner, which might only have been due to doubt if my father's partiality for Dr. Scammony was reasonable. Varnish understood it to imply something else; at least, I thought so. For she took no notice of Gracey's text, and returned to Jemima. "What was the names she called the doctor—your stepmar?" said she.

"Aunt Helen didn't call him any names," said Gracey, at a loss.

"No more than what you told me, just now with your very own lips, Miss Gracey. *Jeepee's* names, to my way of thinking."

"Oh no, it wasn't, Varnish dear, G. P. is initials." Varnish looked incredulous. "It stands for General Practitioner. G for general, and P for practitioner."

"Initials was of no account in my time," said Varnish. "Words was plain words, and what one stands for, one as good as says, and on way out. So your stepmar's no call for to brazen of it out that way. Only more honest to say—what is it?—General Prack Thingummy right off! Anyhow, she said he wanted to keep all the fees for himself. That was nice, to lay at his door! And him as often as not forgetting his bill at Christmas, unless remonstrated."

I remarked that Dr. Scammony was far from being a greedy little cuss, and Varnish seemed appeased. But she matured and confirmed her position. "Anyway, as I say, the doctor's not in favour, and your stepmar she has her reasons." I might have fancifully ascribed this to any tiff in the past between Jemima and Dr. Scammony, had not Varnish continued:—"So she would any one that could rake up. She don't like talk."

I never should have thought it possible to resent a marriage with a widower as Varnish resented the Sly Cat's with my father. I believe, however, that had the latter never known my mother, my old nurse would have been less ferocious towards her. Now I should have said that "the Departed" would always prefer anything to a perfect stranger, as a successor. But I know difference of opinion exists on this point.

I think my father's mind was much easier when he had taken the final step, and sent in his resignation. No mishap occurred

in his correspondence, so far as I knew, between then and Christmas; and if it had, the fact that he had acted so quickly on a first mistrust of his own business powers, would have absolved him from blame. He grew sad and grave as the time came on for his final farewell to the Office, where he had worked for over thirty years. I see now that I was wanting in sympathy, but the truth is that Somerset House had been for me, all my life, so much a mere matter of course, that I failed to regard it as having any qualities whatever. I believe this is intelligible to my Self. If I had to make it so to another person, I should try asking him to analyze his sentiments towards the Lion and the Unicorn, as a work of Art.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

SOMEWHERE about this time I can see, looking back, that I must have crossed the frontier of manhood, and left the region of youth—that one is so eager to see the last of, and regrets all the rest of the time—without encountering so much as a *douanier* to hint at a boundary on the map. A sharp line was drawn, for me, at the end of boyhood, by the death of my old friend, Nebuchadnezzar. It ended a period distinctly, but I am not clear where the next began. However, succinct delimitations are not of the essence of my contract with my Self. I have only promised to write all I can recollect, as nearly as may be in order of its happening.

At the end of that year I was still subject to intermittent attacks of Art; that is to say, Art proper, with moddles. When my work on wood-blocks ran short, I was well disposed towards a spasmodic visit to the Academy Schools. These recrudescences of nude and draped figures, of rickety easels and canvasses that pulled asquint if rashly overwedged, of old familiar smells of dryers and megilp, of new tubes of colour so tenderly reclosed after the first squeeze, so soon neglected and corner-cricketed, revealing to the rash squeezer the meaning, for instance, of Prussian Blue under the finger-nails—these and a many others were so much resurrection from the past, even then.

Or, it may be that I was Rip Van Winkle, or even Lazarus, though I did not get the welcome that Mary and Martha have been supposed to give their brother. On the contrary, suspicion and reproach were visible on the faces of my fellow-students. My reappearance this time—as I suppose in January—was greeted with a collective look askance from an assembly of more faithful votaries of Art Education, and a general remark:—"We thought you weren't coming back." The implication of manner was that they were downcast at the discovery of their mistake. The nearest approach to a welcome was from 'Opkins, who said:—"Back in your old 'ornts, I see," in a tone which left it open whether he was pleased to see me or not. It was not without a sort of pride that he said:—"You'll find us exactly the same. We don't go in for change here." I can fancy the Matterhorn saying this, of

himself and his brother Alps, not without dignity; but 'Opkins had scarcely the same excuses for pluming himself on his immutability. The condition of his wristbands alone would have disqualified him.

Of course, the "study" I began was a farce, for this was the last sitting but one of the moddle. I made a parade of its slight masterliness—its momentary character. It was so slipshod—had so little reference to the head it was "dashed in" from, or anything else; and was, moreover, so unsupported by any evidence of imaginative misinterpretation on the artist's part, that nothing but Time—say a couple of decades—stood between it and the honours of Impressionism. It is a mystery to me, which will last my time, why, the moment that I soared into the realms of Real Art—painting heads from Nature, to wit, especially—I said farewell to accuracy and decision. And even more so that I welcomed, and was welcomed by, both, when I came down from the dizzy heights of Parnassus to the humbler regions of book-prints and initial letters for *Momus*. I wonder if any artist has ever had a like experience.

There was at this time studying in the school a man who afterwards made a reputation with his books on Art. It was generally predicted of him that he would do so, seeing that he had drawn in the Antique School a foot with six toes. "And shaddered 'em up, too!" added 'Opkins, when he told me of the incident. He went on to say that he thought it was an 'ereditary pecooliarity in the heyesight of this gentleman. *But*, he said, he could read 'Orace, and even translate that author. This "but" appeared to have some relation to a mysterious system in 'Opkins's mind which showed him the relative value of human deficiencies, and their compensations.

I suppose that the reason I have forgotten this artist's name is that he was always spoken of as "Pope Sixtoes," in consequence in this error in Arithmetic. It was not Silbermann, but it was somehow the equivalent thereof. I am content to accept Silbermann.

He was a superior person, sitting at the feet of Art in company with a lot of crude youngsters, out of sheer humility. He was very boastful about his humility, and brandished it in a way that made every one else seem bumptious. He always made it understood that his inability to draw or paint anything whatever was a kind of compensation for—or rather Nemesis of—a supreme knowledge of the theory and history of Art. That he did not scruple to lay himself open to the finger of scorn, by coura-

geously mixing with the students at the Academy as a student himself, was a proof how humble he was. But he ran no risk of loss of caste, for he knew all about the *quattrocento* in Italy, and could knock you down with the name of a Tuscan town or artist, or the date of a Grand Duke, and leave you helpless, without turning a hair. He always hung out an Italian word or two on first acquaintance, as a ship at sea shows colours. Not that his nationality was Italian. He was an Art Critic. That was all.

Thus it was that when he and I were almost the last two to depart, after the sitting of the moddle had come to an end, Mr. Silbermann's departure was delayed a moment, and a *pince-nez* was requisitioned from an inner pocket to enable him to see my masterly production. He hoisted his flag, so to speak, as he fished for it, with the inquiry "Permesso?" in a tone of tentative courtesy.

My Italian went that far. "By all means," said I. "But it's a flukey piece of rot."

The Art Critic cooed a protest against this harsh judgment. "We must not say that," said he, deprecatorily. He repeated this two or three times, slower and slower, as he polished the *pince-nez* up to critical examination point. That done, he balanced it on a nose accommodated to a safe level, reminding me of the conjurer's chin arranging for a plate-spin. But the glasses were still fulfilling their mission in life, while none can dine off a centrifugal helping.

He contemplated my abortion calmly, ostentatiously without prejudice, while second hands ticked unseen. Then without disturbing his conjurer's balance, he turned his eyes round to the Artist, asking with decision:—"May I say?"

"Don't bottle up on my account," said I. Or *did* I say it, or only think it? Perhaps the latter. I am certain, anyhow, that my attitude was one of cordial invitation to criticism. "Do please tell me anything you see!" was, I know, the substance of my reply.

Mr. Silbermann, keeping his eyes on me, threw up the fingers of both hands before my study, and pushed its subject back, theoretically. He would have stickled himself with new paint, practically. "*That* is what it wants," said he.

"I see," said I. But I didn't see.

"More mystery!" said he. He fixed me with his eye.

I pleaded that I had pursed an intention to put in the mystery at the end.



His intelligent countenance teemed with a maxim. "Art—Postpones—*Nothing*," said he, in three distinct words. "Do it at once!"

I looked at my watch. "It's getting late," I said. "And the light's going. And they are coming to lock up."

"Well—well—well!" said he, softening the harshness of that maxim. "We must not be too literal. Suppose we say—as soon as possible!"

"All right!" said I. "Next go." I then bethought me of the uncertainties of life, and how I might get an order for comic vignettes and initials to some "Ballades" my friend Bartholomew had offered to *Momus*, and added:—"If I ever touch the thing again! Don't suppose I ever shall."

This, it seemed, was very sad. My new acquaintance shook a slow, reproachful head, and resolved its thoughts into another maxim. "Art—Completes—Everything!"

A vision passed across my mind then, and recurs as I write these words, of serried ranks of unfinished canvasses hiding their faces against the walls of Studios whose owners' names Fame and I have forgotten—Studios that have been the witnesses of more lack of purpose during the last half-century than would have been needed to undermine and break up every contemporary scheme of diabolism, all those years and more! What a pity it could not have been employed on something political!

For the moment, I drew no inference except that Mr. Silbermann had not lived among Artists. I found that this was a mistake, before we parted half-an-hour later. For it turned out that we were going in the same direction, and before we had crossed St. James' Park he had expressed surprise that I was unfamiliar with the inside of the Studios of as many Artists whose work was recognized by the Public as I could count upon my fingers. He had also dwelt at length on several Avenues of Art Thought—I borrow his own expression—among others, the Necessity for Mystery, the Genesis of Vulgarity, the Problem of the Intense, and the Function of the Unintelligible. I felt that I was in the presence of an Analytical Intellect.

I am writing all this about Mr. Silbermann to justify my Self in my own eyes for its subsequent conduct towards him. Otherwise, he does not come into my story.

We parted very good friends, to all appearances, in Sloane Square. And we *were* very good friends, as far as I was concerned. I think that, if anything, my feeling was the more cordial towards him owing to the germination of an Idea which sug-

gested his individuality as a good subject for caricature. I felt that he was going to be of service to me, and was grateful to him by anticipation.

I drew him that evening, for Gracey, under a variety of circumstances which were not likely to arise. They were all more or less developments of the Idea which I was going to submit to Bartholomew for treatment in verse according to the manner of his contributions to *Momus* at that date.

Gracey remonstrated. "But, Jackey darling," said she. "If that is really like this gentleman—that one I mean whose nose is horizontal, in a line with his forehead——"

"That's the most like him. He has to do that, to keep his glasses on."

"Well—if he recognizes it, won't he be in a great rage?"

"I should think he would—most likely. But he doesn't know he's like that. He thinks he's like this—a thoughtful, philosophical bloke." I drew him rapidly, in another aspect.

"But won't he be in a rage with that, too?"

"In another rage? I should say he might. But it won't be such a . . . such a *wicious* one." I distorted my adjective, as more expressive of its acquired meaning, of spite or revenge.

"Well, now!" said Gracey. "I think if I was in Mr. What's-his-name's place I should be in twice as great a rage about the philosophical one. It's much more insulting." I expressed my doubts, and we agreed to leave the point unsettled.

Next day I took these sketches to show them to Bartholomew. He lived in a small set of chambers, at the top of a house in Clipstone Street, that had seen better days. I may have dreamed a good deal of this house, that I now think *bona fide* recollection. I wonder whether there was a bust of Minerva in a helmet in the pediment over the street-door, or was it on the top? Or was the pediment split, so that it came through? The more I think, the more doubtful I get. But, oh!—how long ago it seems!

It had snowed in the night, and the snow had softened the hard heart of a frost, in order that little boys should have first-class ammunition. I am glad now that one of them landed a shot on the middle of my back, as I stood ringing the top bell of a vertical regiment. I am glad, because he was a very bad little boy, and enjoyed his success so. I did not like it then, because some snow got inside my collar. Now I find myself hoping that that bad little boy's grandchildren are like him, and always hit when they aim. It is odd to think that probably no power on earth could identify now, for him, that trivial incident that

I remember so well, so many years ago. And he may have been run over by a cart and killed, half-an-hour later.

The street was musical with scraping shovels, and the wielder of one of them, a hoarse person with no shirt, but with a neck-handkerchief to throw dust in the eyes of impertinent curiosity, took the expression of public opinion on himself. What the authorities were about he couldn't think, allowing these here young nippers all the street to themselves, and no notice took, whatever enormities they were guilty of. It was all very well that an easy-going optimism should indulge in dreams of safety due to the soft character of compacted snow, but now supposing a piece of jagged iron, a broke bottle or a hopen razor if you come to that, had been embedded in it by malice. Then boys and their artfulness! He would challenge the shrewdest foresight to predict what they would be at next. In that quarter, disastrous failure awaited Prophecy. Only, whatever happened, let no man turn round and say that he, the speaker, had kept silence. I had an impression that he continued in the same strain, through the ringing scrape of his contemporaries' shovels, long after I had been admitted by a magic click, and found my way up an empty stairway with a consciousness of the Unseen keeping its eye upon me to see where I was for. I am aware that the language I ascribe to the Unseen is elementary.

My identity was unsuspected by my friend within, who called out to me to put the can inside. I observed that the independent door at the stairtop, which shut him and the World apart, was ajar and wavered suggestively, as though string-pulled. I called out might I come in? and took the answer for granted. I was met by a small figure with a mass of rough auburn hair and very bright eyes, and a dressing-gown which he was lashing together in front in a hurry, having evidently just jumped out of bed. "Hook-ey!" it said. "I thought you were The Milk, late. Thought the cow had refused to yield milk, when milked. . . . If you are familiar with the vulgar tongue, you will understand me when I say that I am Not Up."

I understood the vulgar tongue, and remarked:—"What a lazy beggar you are, Bat! This time in the morning."

He replied with dignity:—"You are mistaken, worthy Sir! You are mistaken, good Gentleman! You are no doubt under the impression that the Average Man, whom you have seen samples of this morning on his way to business, has a greater claim to be considered industrious than myself. Don't deny it."

"Well—it certainly does look. . . ."

“Do not be deceived by appearances! The Average Man, almost without exception, postpones work till after breakfast. Stop the next example of him in the street, and ask it. Tax it with idleness, and convince yourself that what I say is true.” As he spoke, the little man was gradually getting back into bed again, and ended as a head on a pillow—a singular, rather cockatoo-like head, to which the rough auburn hair made a crest. It continued, making the most of the rim of its coverings, but leaving speech free:—“During the mistaken period which has come to an end—I refer to my career as an Artist—I found it difficult to work in bed. Having now finally adopted Literature as a profession, I am at liberty to give the rein to my natural desire for activity. Observe the scattered copy! And don’t tread upon it!”

“That means that you’ve quite chucked Art, I suppose?”

“Absolutely. I believe I have chucked it because the mouth of What’s-his-name—your friend at the Academy——”

“Hopkins?”

“That’s the character. Because his mouth—or what he calls his mouth—so closely resembles my own. Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere, and there is no room in the same profession for two such individual upper lips.” He brought his chin clear of its integument for me to see, and I certainly perceived the resemblance to ‘Opkins’s. In both cases the upper lip overhung. But the difference in their import! Solemnity in ‘Opkins was secured by what bespoke impishness in Bartholomew; a moral maxim reproaching levity in the hearer was replaced by some ridiculous paradox or perverse misinterpretation of palpable fact. The joys of disrespect, not to say impiety, took in Bartholomew’s countenance the place that aggressive duty, fraught with boredom, held in ‘Opkins’s. And yet the upper lips were the same. I sympathize with Lavater’s difficulties.

I accepted Bartholomew’s position as indisputable, but felt that to throw up a profession after giving so much time and labour to it was an extreme step. “Couldn’t somebody assassinate ‘Opkins?” said I. “Let him take his upper lip to Jericho.”

“No, Aristæus,” said my friend, addressing me by a name I had never heard him use before. It was like him to do so, but though I was curious about his selection of this name, I accepted it provisionally in silence, and he went on:—“Consider what Society must be in Jericho. Consider the class of persons that have been sent there, and spare Jericho ‘Opkins. Besides, I may have been influenced by mere gain. I don’t know. Literature seems to hold out a prospect of emoluments to which Art is a

stranger. Moreover, in Art either your work doesn't dry, or stinks of a penetrating nature abound. So consider that I have chucked Art. You have done so yourself, so *you* needn't talk!"

"I beg your pardon, Bat. I have done nothing of the sort. I intend to go on studying Art—real Art—at intervals. I was at Trafalgar Square only three days ago, and made a study. There was an idiot there, by the by, I want to talk about. . . . But why did you call me Aristæus?"

This seemed to require reflection. It ended, and an answer came. "It was inspiration, pure and simple. It seemed to me that you were taking Industry under your protection. Now, broadly speaking, Industry is bees."

"What's that got to do with Aristæus?"

"Much. Aristæus had to do with bees, and was the father of Actæon. Lempriere. He became a Divinity. Ditto. . . . Tell me who the idiot is . . . the one you spoke of just now."

"Oh—Silbermann! Yes, to be sure. I've made a drawing of him. He's a good idiot to draw. You've seen him?—at the Schools. He seems to be an old Student. Comes now and then to sit at the feet of Nature. That sort of thing! I feel he ought to be drawn, and published. I want you to write something for him—in verse preferred. A sort of ballad. Make him an Art Critic. That's his game. You should have heard him criticizing my study. That's him, with the glasses." I handed my notebook, open at the place, for inspection.

"I've seen the beggar—but not there—at the Club! Yes—I must get some letter-press for this chap. Is this another of him?"

"Yes, in another aspect. More philosophical. Less superior. Which would work best, do you think?"

"I was thinking. . . . No—it's no use. I must have them both. They are too lovely to lose, either of them. . . . Stop a bit! I think I know." He flung out of bed suddenly, and was off in the next room—the sitting-room—without stopping for his slippers, and hunting through a mass of print and manuscript. I remonstrated, because of the cold, which of course I did not feel as I had my overcoat on; moreover, I had been walking. He paid no attention, but hunted till he found what he wanted—a MS. Then he rushed back to bed, quite blue, with his teeth chattering, and shivering intentionally, as a comment on the thermometer. "I say, young feller," said he, "suppose you make yourself useful! While I look through this to see what I can find, just you look behind the coal-scuttle in the next room. There



you will see what was in the heyday of its youth a brown paper parcel containing one dozen Patent Fireballs. One is left. Only one! . . . Makes one cry, doesn't it?" . . .

"What's it for?—to light the fire?"

"Exactly. Instructions what to do are on the label. Follow them, and you will find—so I am assured—that it will cause the fire to ignite spontaneously. When I was at school my old master used to flog all the boys who didn't obey him of their own accord. It seems to me that the spontaneity is equivocal in both cases. But that won't matter so long as the fire burns."

I found the lonesome Fireball and started the fire as requested. Then, returning to the bedroom, I suggested that if I knew where breakfast was to be found, I could prepare it. Bartholomew commented on the readiness with which I adopted conventional phraseology. "If breakfast is to be found," he said, "why prepare it?" He was not confident that it could be found, his relations with his tradespeople being very uncertain. "But," he added, "I very seldom take breakfast, in the sense in which that term is generally used, or abused. My industrious habits detain me in bed until anything beyond a cup of coffee would prevent my lunching with a friend at the Club, which is within five minutes. I should be sorry to deprive any friend of the pleasure of giving me lunch, by a too recent indulgence of voracity. Moreover, this *régime* stands between me and extravagance in house-keeping. Of course I regret, my dear friend, that I am not in a position to offer you anything. Otherwise I cannot say I resent the high-handed behaviour of the Milk, in not coming. It would only have gone sour, as far as I am concerned. I believe that your familiarity with the vernacular will show you my meaning when I say that I shall pay its account, and withdraw my custom. It might be obscure, to a foreigner. . . . Here's the thing I was looking for."

I explained that my anxiety about breakfast was on his account, not mine. The MS. he had found was my interest. I held out my hand, saying:—"Let's have a look!"

"Stop a bit!" said he. "It needs explanation. It is a tale in verse—rather juvenile verse—of a pair of twins. Their name was fortunately Binns, to rhyme to twins. These things happen. They had good and noble characters, but erred in the choice of a profession. They devoted themselves to mistaken objects."

"What did they go in for?"

"Felony. One of them took over a practice in the West of England, as a Highwayman. The other—of a thoughtful turn,

more a student than a man of action—addicted himself to Forgery.”

“I don’t see how that cap fits Silbermann?”

“Not Silbermann considered as twins? Look upon this picture and on this!” He indicated the two portraits of the Art Critic—the thoughtful and the active version. “Mr. Silbermann is not twins *per se*, but he is their equivalent. His duality is inherent in his unity. I might cite a parallel case, but my Reverential Spirit stands in my way. I am celebrated for my Reverential Spirit.”

“But we can’t make him out either a highwayman or a forger.”

“No. But I can alter the poem to meet the case. Nothing easier. I see my way plainly.” He paused reflectively, then added:—“Not one Art Critic, but two Art Critics!” From which I inferred that his Reverential Spirit was deserting him.

“Suppose you read me the poem as it is, Bat!” said I. For I didn’t feel sure that the change suggested would tell against the identification of its subjects, but the contrary. He then read me the verses, lying as completely in bed as the need of two hands to hold the manuscript permitted.

I can remember him, reading, better than I can remember what he read; though I may do that gradually, if I try. His mop of auburn hair and his gleaming eyes would have made him an individuality without his peculiar upper lip, whose resemblance to ‘Opkins’s had—according to him—modified his destiny. I recollect feeling that one of his nicknames among his friends, “Flittermouse,” had a sort of fitness in it. But this may have been due to the last syllable. One knows the massive forehead of a mouse. Of course, however, in him the name was a mere amplification of Bat, short for Bartholomew.

I have tried since I stopped writing yesterday to recollect a full sample of Bartholomew’s ballad of “The Twin Felons,” but I can only recover a scrap here and there. I recall the opening, plainly enough. Here it is:—

“Augustin and Angustus Binns,  
To whom these lines relate,  
Commenced a joint career as Twins  
In eighteen forty-eight.”

The author seemed gratified with this, and, having read it twice, looked round at me to say:—“Reads easily, Aristæus?” I assented, but remarked on the date. It was rather a late period for highway robbery, with holster pistols and jack-boots,

which struck me as essential. Bartholomew replied that the Poet's first obligation was towards rhyme, his second to metre, his third to meaning; while as for chronology, he was not sure that it came in at all. He could, however, make it twenty-eight. But the word twenty, just after "twins," sounded poor and mincey. I said it didn't matter, and he continued:—

"Their parents when they came to choose  
Their infants' Christian names  
Espoused antagonistic views,  
And justified their claims. . . ."

After which I only remember scraps. The substance, however, remains with me. The father considered that twins being alike by nature, to confusion-point, their parents should distinguish their names as widely as possible. He suggested "Timothy" and "Napoleon" for these two. Their mother was very positive in the opposite direction, maintaining substantially that as the same thing was always called by the same name, things exactly resembling one another should be called by names as nearly as possible alike. She was not quite sure that the names should be more distinguishable than their owners, but yielded to convention on this point. She insisted on the adoption of the two names, Augustin and Augustus, which are just short of identity.

The children so named grew to be young men of great promise, but were ill-advised in the choice of a profession. For though all went well for a while, disaster overtook them in the end, and they were tried and convicted at the same Assizes. A doubt arising as to which was which, the presiding Judge declined to pass sentence. If the names had been accidentally reversed, he said, the forger might be hanged, and the highwayman sent to penal servitude. If the sentences required by Law were the same in both cases, it would be immaterial. He could then pass sentence on them as twins, and they could suffer as twins. As it was, there was nothing for it but to defer sentence until it was settled which was which. And the culprits, who alone knew, refused to make any statement.

"I left it at that," said Bartholomew when he had got thus far. "I don't see what else there was to be done with them."

"Commit them for Contempt of Court?" I suggested.

"There was none. Each had answered to his name, so all demands of Law had been complied with, and it was owing to the stupidity of a gaoler that they got mixed. He ought

to have earmarked them on the spot. Of course each tried to convince the Judge that he was the highwayman, as the career of a forger is at best an inglorious one; let alone the preference every right-minded man has for hanging, as against penal servitude. Moreover, it was obvious that only one of them was claiming a false identity, and it would have been most unfair to the truthful man to throw doubt on his reputation as a murderer, in favour of the unconfirmed statement of his brother, whose business habits must have predisposed him to mendacity." Bartholomew paused a moment; then said thoughtfully:—"The subject bristles with difficulties—and pitfalls. What a curious thing, when you come to think of it, that anything should bristle with pitfalls!"

I assented. But I did not see how this story could be adapted—at least without great labour, amounting to rewriting—to the career of two Art Critics; more especially because, in our present imperfect state of civilization, Art Criticism was not a statutable offence.

"Perhaps you are right, my dear Aris," said the Poet. "Suppose we run the risk of hurting Silbermann's feelings. We won't let McMomus have it unless he takes all responsibilities of publication. . . . Oh yes—he'll want it fast enough, I'll answer for that!" For I had begun to speculate on the possibility of rejection by the journal.

One thing that has made me revive so much of this talk with my literary colleague is his sudden and whimsical application to me of the name Aristæus, abbreviated to Aris. He called me by it again once in the hearing of 'Opkins, with the result of course that *he* called me 'Arris, expressing his surprise that Bartholomew should drop an H, with his education. For 'Opkins was indignant when he was told he dropped his own, conceiving, I fancy, that the image of the letter in his mind would be audible to his hearer owing to his own goodwill towards it. I got used to the name as a nickname, at the Academy, but never elsewhere, as it chanced; and when I came here it occurred to me to be a good one to assume, as I did not wish to be known. The people here want a name to speak of me by, and this one does as well as another. So I am "Old Harris," even to the Reverend Turner. He will not count it as deception, though, for he said to me once:—"A Pseudonym is quite excusable, if it is only meant as a distinctive name in a crowd."

## CHAPTER XL

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

My rough sketches of the highwayman and the forger were greeted by the Editor of the comic weekly *Momus* with acclamation. He went by the name of McMomus; inevitably, as his name was McMurrough. I had entertained some idea that I might somehow abate the individuality\* of the Twins, to avoid personality, and was rather disconcerted when Mr. McMurrough stipulated for close identification with their original; which was, he said, half the battle. The said original was claimed by him as an intimate friend; but none the less, as a fool; a triumph of the handiwork of his Creator, whose status as a maker of Fools the grossest materialist could not dispute.

I felt quite guilty when I was next greeted by Mr. Silbermann at the Academy. For was I not actually engaged in portraying him both as a highwayman and a forger. I should have felt grateful to him if he would have been rude and disagreeable, so as to justify the appropriation of his image. He was, on the contrary, irritatingly courteous; and when in the end he asked me to come and lunch with him at his club, I felt that the position was becoming formidable.

In my embarrassment I sought advice from Gracey, who at first refused to treat the matter seriously, which perhaps was my own fault, for although I wanted advice to get me out of my deadlock it seemed humiliating to confess it, and I endeavoured to make light of my position even while I was anxious to lay stress on its difficulty. She, however, soon read between the lines of my communication, but not by the help of anything I said. Her blue eyes detected something in my countenance, and I can see her face again now, as pity comes into them suddenly, and takes the place of mere unconcerned laughter.

"Why, you poor darling, silly boy!" she said. "I do really think you're feeling it in your tummy." Which was an old familiar *mot de famille*, which may have been indigenous. Its meaning goes painfully home to me now, all the more perhaps that I have never heard it since those days, so long ago.

"Well!" I said, with as much admission as consisted with male superiority. "It is an awkward fix, now isn't it?"



Gracey's commiseration for me became quite as active as could be countenanced by dignity. "Yes, darling!" said she, kissing me and ruffling my hair. "It is rather a fix. Suppose we ask Papa what he thinks?"

"Suppose we do!" said I, magnanimously ignoring what I recognized as a slight elder-sisterliness. I gave Gracey leave to broach the subject in any way she chose.

"What sort of chap is Mr. Silbermann?" said my father that evening, when the case had been laid before him. "Is he the sort of chap that sees a joke?"

"No," I replied. "That's just it. He's one of your solemn beggars."

"I think he must be some one else's," said my father. "Because I don't stock the article. However, I understand that he is not the sort of man you can take into your confidence. Otherwise that is the course I should have suggested."

"I can't fancy myself doing it," said I, after a moment's reflection. "Besides, look at this! Suppose I show him the drawings and he flares up. I should have to back out, and do others instead."

"I see," said Gracey. "You would stand committed to doing so, by asking him. I should say—don't ask him, but brazen it out."

I shook my head. "You wouldn't say that, G., if you saw what a dignified sort of bloke he is, and what good manners he has." This evidently puzzled Gracey, so I tried elucidation. "Well—he's a sort of grown-up person! *You* know what I mean." Gracey evidently didn't, nor did my father. I concluded:—"His giglamps alone are too many for me."

"Your line of description," said my father, "suggests an image to the mind. The only question is—is it the image you mean to suggest?" He picked up my sketches of Mr. Silbermann, and considered them. "I see a certain consistency between the two. But it strikes me that when you omit his giglamps, as you call them, you will be quite safe. I don't suppose he will recognize himself without them, or any of his friends."

I shook my head continuously and emphatically. "No, go!" I said. "Not the ghost of a go! I meant to leave them out on the highwayman's nose, but Bat and McMomus said it would spoil everything. They had seen the first sketch with the glasses on, and were nuts on it. They said a short-sighted highwayman was half the battle. And you must have the Twins alike

in all respects, except that one must be dressed like a highway-man and the other like a forger."

"How do you propose to dress the forger?" said my father. "It seems to me you may find it difficult to make him recognizable. Do all forgers dress alike? Costume was never a strong point of mine."

"I think," said I, "that I should dress him like a parson that had been turned out of the Church."

"Do *they* all dress alike?"

"Well—perhaps not exactly. But you know the sort of thing I mean? Not like a Squire, nor a Lawyer, nor a Doctor. Much more like a squelched Parson, only not so threadbare. Don't you think so, Gracey?"

Gracey compared the models, mentally. "I'm not sure," she said. "Oughtn't he to look more prosperous? Because if forging didn't pay, nobody would ever go on with it. Besides, as Papa says, they would not all dress alike—or not necessarily."

"I didn't mean," said my father, "to speak positively. Merely a surmise! Do Murderers dress alike, as a rule?"

We looked at each other doubtfully. No one could speak from experience. "What does Aunt Helen think?" said Gracey. My stepmother was deep in the daily press, not joining in the conversation.

"Yes," said my father. "What do *you* think, Helen? Do Murderers dress alike—male Murderers?"

Now I think the reason I find all the foregoing so authentic—for very little of it can be called reconstruction—is that the incident which followed was vivid enough to fix its antecedents in my recollection. Even at this distance of time the scared look on my stepmother's handsome face is fresh in my mind as she drops the *Post* in her lap and exclaims, with large, frightened eyes fixed on my father:—"What on earth are you talking of, Mr. Pascoe? . . . Yes—who said Murderers?"

"God bless me, my love!" said my father. "What's all the shine for? I said Murderers. Why shouldn't I say Murderers? We've been talking about Murder in connection with some of Jackey's drawings. Nobody has murdered anybody, at present. Nobody's mare's dead."

"I beg your pardon," said Jemima, apologetically. "I didn't mean, what set you off on such an unpleasant subject? Oh dear; I wonder what has made me so nervous and fanciful!" She pressed her fingers on her closed eyes, and took them off to look at, as if she thought the lids might have come off on them. "I

wasn't listening—that was all! . . . No—my pulse is all right. But feel it, by all means, if you want to." For my father had gone across to her, and appropriated her wrist, with intent. I should have seen that this upset about nothing made him very uneasy, even if he had not recently talked once or twice to me about his misgivings that my stepmother would injure her nervous system with some anodyne she had been indulging in to get sleep. His investigation of the pulse ended in his saying:—"No—that's all right. Quite normal. You're a queer customer," and going back to his armchair. She said:—"I told you so!" and took up the *Post* again. But I don't believe she read it.

A freak of Memory cuts events short at this point, and I cannot remember how we settled about the Twins. I am even with her again an hour later, in my father's library over a wind-up smoke. He can only talk of Jemima's nervous system, and the previous speculations over Murderers and Forgers are forgotten.

"Your stepmamma, Jackey, is a very foolish woman. I can tell you that. This all comes of her getting no sleep o' nights. And if I could only get her to take advice, a few shillingworth of doctor's stuff would set her all to rights in no time. Instead of which it appears that she buys any chance abomination she sees on a chemists' counter, and takes it without my knowing. Scammony says those things are the very devil. . . . Yes—I've talked to him about her."

"Just what I tell you—that those sleeping draughts and anodynes give temporary relief, and make matters ten times worse in the end. Then the nerves break down altogether, and the constitution breaks up altogether, as like as not. I wish to Heaven she would see some one. Not Scammony, as she has some fancy against him, but some proper man for a case of this sort."

"Has he any ideas about the cause of it?"

"Dr. Hammond? He may have, but he won't say anything. He's a cautious bird, for all that he looks as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. However!" This was a way my father had of dismissing a subject, and he further showed that he had done so by embarking on an abstract speculation as to whether an incautious bird would look as if butter would so melt, and how it would show itself.

I gathered that he had been seeing Mr. Scammony, probably about himself. So I asked him what professional experience had been telling him about his own health.

"Oh—I'm all right! I'm to go on with the diet, of course."

"Because—why?"

"Merely as a prophylactic. Merely as a prophylactic."

"Oh—merely as a prophylactic?"

"No—I really am perfectly right. I could do with much less sleep than seems inevitable nowadays. I never used to sleep so ferociously at the Office—in the old days. I suppose it is only that I had so much more to keep me awake—in the old days. I tell you this, Master Jackey, and you may as well keep it in mind, in case you are ever an influential man. No Government arrangements will ever be perfect until some way is invented of employing men who are no longer fit for work—some sort of carts for horses to pull that have to be taken out of harness. One doesn't take kindly to doing nothing, even when one is not fit for doing anything else."

I could not help feeling that perhaps the harness had been thrown off prematurely in his case. But I had not the heart to say so, as it certainly would not have bettered matters. I could only take refuge in general sympathy, and a vague indictment of all Governments as idiotic.

"I wouldn't go so far as that," said my father, laughing. "But I can't help thinking that instead of giving pensions, it would be a good thing that an official should die out gradually, with a lessening salary and diminishing responsibility. I know there would be difficulties, because it's no easy matter to convince an old cock that he doesn't know better than everybody else. But it ought to be possible to quench him slowly, for his own sake. I could make a very good abstract now, or throw another man's rough sketch of a letter into working form, quite as well as when I was a juvenile with a low salary. And I shall be good for copying clerk's work for years to come. Why should I be compelled to enjoy a leisure I don't the least appreciate, simply because I am no longer fit for a leading part? An old actor dies in harness, if only as a walking gentleman. Old doctors—old dentists—who ever hears of their retiring, short of ninety-odd? Did any one ever know of a Judge being interrupted by senility? While as for Bishops!—surely a superannuated Bishop is a contradiction in terms. The more venerable, the more episcopal! No—nobody ever retires, except Officials, and soldiers and sailors. And Officials are the worst off of the three, because they are expected not to swear. The two other sorts may swear, and do. I've heard 'em."

My father ran on, dwelling on the drawbacks of retirement,

but always in a good-humoured strain, without bitterness. I had before this observed that he was very sleepy through the day, and became chatty in the evening. The theory that office-work, in old times, kept him awake, would hardly hold water. His sleepiness in the day had a well-marked character of its own; it never yielded to any rousing influence. Mere *désœuvré* laziness does more; it welcomes it. Just before bedtime, over his last pipe, he would be more himself than at any other hour of the day. I suppose that at this time I was beginning to feel more uneasiness on his score than previously, as I associate with this evening a consciousness that this fact was borne in upon me, then and there. I contemplated an alliance with Jemima, in her efforts to induce him to see a specialist, which she persevered in, while refusing to consult one about her own sleeplessness. It occurred to me that I might prepare the way. "I say, P," said I, "would it be such a bad idea if you were to let that bigwig have a look at you—Dr. Scammony's bigwig that he talked about? It couldn't do any harm, and he must know *something* about the matter." I regarded this as a generous concession to a profession whose ignorance of Therapeutics is proverbial.

"Sir Alcibiades Rayson? I would do so with pleasure, my dear boy, if it were not for a conviction, founded on long experience, that no man survives a consultation with a specialist more than a twelvemonth. If the specialist calls in another to help, I should say the probable duration of the patient's life would be six weeks at most. A third would mean sudden death. No—at present I am not developing any symptoms whatever; in fact, I am neglecting my opportunities. All I say is, don't hurry me, and I shall live to a . . . well—perhaps not to a green old age! Suppose we say a whitey-brown old age, and let it go at that!"

I did not like his way of envisaging his own mortality, and in my eyes the only question was about the colour of that old age. I wanted badly to pooh-pooh Death, in his particular case. I could not go so far as that. But I could shift the *venue* of the conversation. I began saying:—"Jemima——"

"Your stepmamma," said he, with very slight protest.

"Grizzles awfully about it," said I, finishing my sentence to suit either designation. "She says you are sacrificing yourself to an absurd prejudice against medical advice."

"Oh, that's to be the way, is it? Well, next time she says that, you tell her that stepmammias that live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. If she will let Scammony prescribe for



her, and take his medicine, I'll see Sir Alcibiades. You may tell her that, Master Jackey. Understand?"

I gathered that discussion of the point by the principals concerned was, in his view, no longer efficacious to any good end, and nodded my acceptance of the embassy, saying briefly, "All right—I'll say so next time," meaning next time talk gave me a chance. No particular opportunity came about, and it seemed easier, as it turned out, to take Gracey into my confidence. A male who does not see his way always consults "the weaker sex."

Gracey said at once:—"What a good idea! We shall kill two birds with one stone. Now, Jackey, you let me manage Aunt Helen. Don't you cut in and spoil it." As I did not feel at all sure that I should manage Aunt Helen, I gave the undertaking asked for.

Varnish was always pessimistic about anything that involved her *bête noire*, so I was not surprised to see silent incredulity in her face when Gracey, sitting on the table before the fire in her sanctum—for this was during a Parliamentary Debate—spoke with such confidence of her own ability to influence her stepmother. I was a little surprised when, Gracey having been called away, she allowed a personal feeling to influence her speech about Jemima's peculiar antipathy to medical treatment. I told her flatly that I thought the Governor was just as bad, or worse. I think I can write the conversation that followed, word for word, beginning with Varnish.

"No, Master Jackey, all wrong you are! In your pa's eye, a medical man's a medical man, and comes when sent for. Your stepmar goes by its being Dr. Scammony, and partick'lar."

"Do you suppose then, Varnish, that Jemima would let another doctor have his whack? Is it only because her back's up against little Scammony?"

Varnish was waxing a thread on beeswax held in her teeth. She stopped seesawing it in the groove it had cut—and stopped also the counter-seesaw of her head—to nod the latter and say through the wax:—"And Dr. Partnership that he's took up with. Only not so bad. Dr. Scammony he's the one gives offence."

"I know she hates the old boy. But Why?"

"Ah—why and wherefore? Well, Master Jackey, I'm saying no more than I've said twice and once, afore this. So I say it again. A doctor gentleman sees more than he says, coming in and out of a house, and making free. And when it's between Dr. Scammony and not Dr. Scammony, your stepmar she says

soonest not. That's the most I say, Master Jackey. And you'll see. You'll get her to have another doctor, if that will satisfy your par. But not Dr. Scammony! Not she!"

I never could understand at that time why Varnish should always fight shy of a clear indictment of the Sly Cat. The real reason may have been the same as mine for leaving unspoken a speech I could have formulated, somehow. I could have said:—"I suppose you mean that Jemima wanted to marry the Governor all along?" But it stuck in my utterance by anticipation. It was not from delicacy towards the Sly Cat at all, but an undefined respect for my father. Yet I wanted Varnish to be explicit, as I see now unreasonably, while I shrank from expressing the same idea myself. She was more mysterious than ever, this time. And, indeed, I did not find that lapse of years made speech about my mother's death, and the incidents that followed it, any easier.

A day or two later, as I entered the drawing-room where Gracey and my stepmother were alone together, Gracey said:—"Here he is. Ask him yourself, Aunt Helen." Which caused Aunt Helen, who was reading the *Cornhill* tentatively, turning the leaves to find an interesting passage, to close the number and give attention to current event. "Ask him what?" she said. "Oh yes—I remember! Gracey says, Jackey, that your father has promised to see Sir Alcibiades Rayson if I consent to letting that odious little Hammond man prescribe for me. She says he said so to you, in the library."

"That's what he said. Only he meant you were to take the prescriptions. No cheating!"

"Of course! Silly boy!" said Jemima, absently, looking handsome, but vexed and perplexed. And Gracey said:—"Of course, Jackey, that's part of the game."

"Well!" said I. "How was I to know?" The point dropped.

My stepmother said, still with that perplexity on her face:—"Did he really mean a promise, or was he only talking?"

"He was quite in earnest, if that's what you mean," I said. "If you would see Scammony, he would see Sir Alcibiades What's-his-name." I was stopped by Gracey saying:—"Hush—there he is!" And thereupon my father came in, and as her ears had been sharp and detected him in time, we succeeded in talking about the Confederates and Stonewall Jackson plausibly, so that he did not know he himself had just been on the tip of our tongues. I saw no reason why we should not have tackled the subject then and there, but took Gracey's word for it.

However, a few days later, she said to me:—"I shouldn't wonder

if that was Dr. Hammond." She referred to an indisputable doctor's carriage which was being sent on from the opposite house to ours. "He's never been here before, you know," she continued. "Isn't it funny?"

"Well, no!" said I. "Considering how Jemima hates him. I suppose she and the Governor have squared it."

"I don't know if that's the way to put it exactly," said Gracey, looking through the window at the doctor, now arriving. "Anyhow, Papa has committed himself to see the specialist. I hope Aunt Helen means to be good, and follow Dr. Hammond's treatment. I'm afraid, you know, she'll only promise and then throw away his medicines."

"That's her little game," said I, confidently. This was in the upstairs room, formerly Roberta's and Miss Evans's. I had converted it to a workroom for myself, and called it my Studio. But though I had established an easel there, to be for a sign, I had never used it for any Real Art. I had not, however, been able to ignore my connection with it altogether, and had covered the lower half of the window with an opaque blind, just high enough to compel Gracey to stand on tiptoe to see Dr. Scammony's arrival. Her image comes back to me now, with its circle of sunny brown hair against the light, and brings back the green baize screen, whose mission was to keep alive the memory of Michelangelo, neglected for caricatures that could have been executed just as well without it. At the time I was drawing Augustus Binns, forging. I was shutting my eyes to the *mauvais quart d'heure* in store for me when the time came for publication.

Gracey, who, when at home, fluctuated between this workroom and the drawing-room, where the piano was, went away to show cordiality to the doctor. "I can't trust Aunt Helen to be civil to him," said she. "At least, she'll be lofty and freezing, and the little man doesn't deserve it." And off she went.

She returned later and told me of the interview, of which I saw nothing myself; for I knew I should not be wanted, and kept away. Besides, I was busy. So was Augustus Binns—so busy that he was unconscious that the police had come for him.

Gracey was a very good narrator of event, and I think I can resume her story. She had gone straight to the drawing-room, and found Dr. Scammony reading Wordsworth. He put this book back with its fellows, she said, as though he had been caught plagiarizing.

"Not seeing my way to anything original," she continued. "I took refuge in the fact that Aunt Helen would be down in a minute; only I didn't say Aunt Helen—I said Mrs. Pascoe. I urged him to sit down, as if delay in doing so might have serious consequences. When I had got him safe on a chair, stroking his chin and staring at me as though I were a sort of specimen, I thought I would venture on a bold flight, and said:—'You are not looking a year older, Dr. Hammond.' He replied:—'Who—me?—well! I looked a good age, certainly, seven years ago. I haven't grown younger, though, with time. . . . Yes, it's nearly eight years since your mother died. You haven't seen me since those days.' I had it in my head to say that this was because I had never been ill. But he was looking serious, and I felt kept in order.

"Then it crossed my mind that he would not necessarily identify Aunt Helen. . . . Oh yes—I know it was a mistake; but I made it, for all that. I said bluntly:—'I suppose you know that my stepmother—she'll be down in a minute—is the same as Miss Evans, our governess?' He answered:—'Oh, of course, of course!' rather as if he meant did I take him for a fool. Then he sat looking at me reflectively, and presently said:—'Let me see!—you were Gracey, and one of your sisters had gone away with Miss Evans, to some play-acting, somewhere.'

"'Yes,' I said. 'To Roehampton. To the Graypers'. That is her name now. She was the heroine, and she married the hero. They live at Kingston.' I felt rather offended with the little man for not showing more interest in this.

"Then he seemed hard up for something to say, and kept on:—'Yes—Miss Evans. Miss Evans—yes,' in a idiotic sort of way. However, he thought better of it, I suppose, and pulled himself together, saying all of a sudden:—'Mrs. Pascoe has had nights—your father tells me?'

"'She can't sleep a wink,' said I, and began talking about Aunt Helen's lying awake; merely for something to say, because he was bound to have it all over again as soon as she came. He sat and nodded like a Mandarin, until he heard Aunt Helen coming, and stopped. 'There she is,' I said, 'coming down now.'

"She was rather stiff and short with him, I thought, seeing that it was no fault of his that Papa sent for him. . . . Well, I can't recollect *exactly* what she said, but it was what I should call miffy."

"What sort of miffy?" I asked. For I was curious to know.

"Much-enduring miffy," said Gracey. "Acquiescence-under-

compulsion miffy. I've-got-to-answer-and-I-suppose-I-must miffy. That sort of miffy!"

"I see," I really did, being accustomed to complex adjectives of this sort. "And what did little Scammony say?"

"All the usual things."

"Pulses—tongues—I know. But didn't he say something about the Governor?"

"Not a word. But I fancy he was just going to, when he thought of something else."

"What was that?"

"When he'd got his sheet of note-paper to write his prescription, he pretended he had forgotten something, and looked up. I said:—'Isn't there ink?' He said there was plenty of ink, only he supposed perhaps he ought to mention. Aunt Helen said mention what?—and he finished writing his prescription. Then he said:—'Only a matter of form in this case. At least, I hope so. Mental uneasiness. Frequent cause of insomnia. Any mental uneasiness?'"

"Only Mr. Pascoe's health," said Aunt Helen, rather reproachfully. And I think the little man deserved it, for he might have known. He saw that, for he began excusing himself out of it."

"What did he say?" I asked. Not that I was very curious to know. I was in fact very much engaged on Augustus Binns, and was talking slackly.

But Gracey took my inquiry in earnest. "What *did* he say?" said she. "I think I can recollect. I know I thought it capital excuse-making. . . . Oh, I know! First he said Papa was all right, and Mrs. Pascoe needn't fidget about that. Then he tried for something better. He said——" Here Gracey became conscientiously thoughtful.

"Cut along," said I.

"He said:—'Besides, I understood that this sleeplessness was of very old standing. Mr. Pascoe's is quite a recent trouble.' Aunt Helen said:—'Quite recent. But I did not say of *very* old standing.' He said—and I think it was this put Aunt Helen's back up:—'I beg pardon. I thought I understood it was as old as when you were in Mecklenburg Square.' Aunt Helen quite snapped at him. Oh dear, no!—it was nothing of the sort. 'Who told you that, Dr. Hammond?' He didn't look frightened—I suppose he gets used to fierce patients—and said:—'I had it from Mr. Pascoe. He quoted his married daughter, Mrs. Grayper, as his authority, and told me a funny story about your talking in your sleep. . . .'"



"Of course," I said. "*I* remember that. I mean I remember Bert talking about it. I told the Governor—don't you recollect?—when Jemima was on the sofa. . . ."

Gracey remembered this conversation, which I feel sure I have written down in this narrative, or some of it. "What—about the hot-cross buns being Windsor soap!" said she. "Yes—I recollect. Well, Papa must have told Dr. Scammony about that. And it made Aunt quite angry."

"Because it made her look like a fool, I suppose?"

"No—silly boy! Because it looked as if Papa had been saying she always had bad nights, and it's only just lately. At least, I *suppose* that was it. Anyhow, Aunt Helen was quite annoyed about it."

"And he didn't look scared, or apologized?"

"No—he sat looking at Aunt Helen as if he was considering her."

"What a cheeky little beggar he is, after all!"

"I shouldn't put it that way, Jackey. It was only a mistake. . . . This one's the last picture of the lot, isn't it! What are those things on the shelf?"

"Those! Bottles. Bottles of stuff used in forging. Are they indistinct?"

"I didn't make out what they were. I see now."

"The woodcutter will make them a little clearer, if I explain them. She's very clever at that. I always tell her she could do just as well without anything drawn at all. I shall take this one myself to the shop, and explain it."

"Are they all girls that cut the blocks?"

"This one's a girl. A. Addison. That's her name. There are two others, only one of them isn't a girl—she's a female—what one understands by a female."

"What a ridiculous boy you are! What's A. Addison like?"

"I don't see that it matters. What *is* she like?" I had to cogitate over this, and at last saw my way to:—"Well—her hair comes down and gets in her way when she's at work."

"Is that all?"

"No—her nose is marked."

"On the tip?"

"Well—not so far off, if you come to that." I had not touched my own nose to locate A. Addison's disfigurement, but to bring noses as it were on the *tapis*. "It's not a bad mark, but you see it when you look for it, for all that!"

"Oh—you do look for it then?" I suppose I evinced discom-

future—scarcely resentment—or Gracey would not have said, as I distinctly recollect her doing:—"There!—he shall have his little A. Addison, he shall, and he shan't be teased! Only, Jackey dear, do tell me what colour her eyes are?"

I began to say, somewhat warmly:—"She hasn't got any eyes." But reservation was necessary. "At least, not in that sense! They aren't any colour—in particular."

"Grey, I suppose?"

"Oh yes—grey if you like. Anything."

"I suppose she's got hands?"

Now the fact was I had called more than once at Knotter's workshop, on fair enough pretexts perhaps, but always, after the first time, with a distinct prevision of A. Addison's hands, which were comely, and deft to put back hair that got in her way when she was at work. So I had a sneaking desire to talk about one of them at least—the left one. "Of course she's got hands," said I. "Two. One of them to keep her hair out of her eyes!"

"That's the one," said Gracey, with that curious insight into my mind which I fancy I have referred to before. Then I recollect that Varnish's voice inquired for Miss Gracey without, whereupon Miss Gracey called to her that she was in my room; and, when she appeared, continued:—"Do come in, Varnish, and hear about A. Addison, who has a mark on her nose, and whose hair comes down and gets in her way."

"Law there now!" said Varnish. "If I didn't think it was going to be Miss Featherstone Haw!" I write the name thus because this was, I am sure, Varnish's way of spelling it mentally.

"Oh no, Varnish! Why—she's freckled! You don't care for Lucy Featherstonehaugh—now *do* you, Jackey?"

"Which is Lucy?" said I. "The boniest, or the boniest but one?"

"Now you're pretending, and I shan't talk. . . . No—do tell Varnish about A. Addison, and don't be sprocketty."

I itemized my account of A. Addison, but without greatly interesting Varnish, who was preoccupied. She said to Gracey, across my particulars:—"Your stepmar she's put out with the doctor, and she don't think she's coming down to dinner to-night, and it's odds but she'll go to bed." Gracey's attention was taken off A. Addison, and she said:—"Oh—I was afraid." To which Varnish replied:—"Yes. He's disagreed with her—he has." And they talked of something else.

## CHAPTER XLI

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

MEMORY takes me back to those days of my early manhood, with its fiction of anchorage to a rock I had split upon, in the ocean of High Art; its reality of a successful embarkation in a much less pretentious vessel, on a sea that I affected to consider a mere duck-pond by comparison. Or, perhaps, I should rather say an estuary into which I had drifted on the high tide of a chance good fortune, for the turn of which I must watch, to be carried back to the fulfilment of my true destiny, the use of oil-paint on colossal canvasses, the interpretation of Mythology and History. Acis and Galatea, and Henry the Eighth and Cardinal Wolsey—that sort of thing!

I am sure I had no misgiving, as I walked up Long Acre the day after Dr. Scammony “disagreed with” Jenima, that the tide of that estuary would never turn me back to the sea of that vague world-fame I had conceived myself entitled to, backed by Mrs. Walkinshaw. I regarded the wood-blocks of my pictorial additions to Bartholomew’s tale in verse as incidents by the way, things the World would laugh at and forget. Until one day the biographer of a great painter would discover their back number of *Momus* in a British Museum exploration, and discern therein the hand that afterwards gave us something or other he would be polysyllabic about to his heart’s content. Whereupon the World would wonder at the insignificance of the twig the bird clung to, and, if in a right-minded mood, would marvel at the mysterious ways of Providence.

I suppose it was one of them that took me to Knotter’s, the wood engraver’s, that morning. Only I cannot see that any other way, leading to totally different results, would have been a particle less mysterious. Some of the intelligible ways of Providence ought to be scheduled, for comparison. However, that has no connection with the matter in hand. I *did* go to Knotter’s, bearing in my hand the wood-block I had just completed of Augustin Binns forging, because I had some instructions to give the cutter that could not be conveyed in writing. I must needs laugh at my Self, or my Self at me, as I write these words. Is it true, then, that it was quite impossible to give my instructions in a letter?

Knotter's was in the middle of a fog, when I got there; and the fog was making Knotter choke, in the person of his representative. He himself, whoever he was, had, I believe, long been beyond the reach of London fogs, however much he may have suffered from Stygian gloom—a poor substitute at the best, not the real thing at all!

Mr. Straight, the representative, could not tell me, for choking, whether I should find Miss Addison at work. But I took a movement of his pen towards the penetralia beyond to mean at least that I could see for myself, and I found my way over a cat towards the most inaccessible stairway I have ever known, before or since. It was like the turret stair in a Norman ruin that weak characters allow guides to goad them up to see the views. Only that, in that case, when the tread-corner is worn away to the diagonal of its section, and what was a stair has become a slide, the fact that it is solid stone accounts for what is left; while, in this, speculation was at a loss to supply imagination with any better foothold than empty space. It was, however, substantial enough for some hammer in a hand long dead to have driven tacks into; for oil-cloth of incredible age covered in what once were treads and risers, and left speculation and imagination to make the best they might of the support beyond. If this were a book, I should not feel free to write so much about an old staircase, but it pleases me to do so because it expresses what I have so often longed to express about the means which I have been supplied with for getting upstairs, and coming down.

I got up these, with a stumble or two, and found a door-panel to knock at. I can distinctly remember standing there in the dark, hoping, without admitting it, that A. Addison *was* there, hand and all. I felt that Miss Procter, her supervisor in the cutting of blocks, would be a wet blanket; even though equally competent—indeed more so—to take an exhortation or instruction as to a method of rendering.

"Come in!" cried a girl's voice from the other side. It was not the sort of voice one expects to come out of a London fog. Also, it wasn't Miss Procter's. I knew that. But it might be one of the apprentices—one of the *alumnae* of the art of block-cutting. I hoped not, because it was a voice I should have liked A. Addison to have. Not that I admitted it. I was inwardly disclaiming any interest in A. Addison, all the time, without suspecting my disclaimer of being self-accusation. I opened the door furtively, and the voice said again, "Come in!" with a sort of elongation of the words, as though to add force or encouragement.

or finish to a rough sketch. I went in, and there was A. Addison, by herself! She was intent upon her work, and I suppose thought I was some sub-auxiliary who had been told always to knock.

I began, "I beg your pardon——" and she looked round, startled; and, doing so, overturned the small standard gas-lamp, fed by an elastic tube, which had been concentrating its Cyclops eye on her field of vision.

"Never mind!" said she. "Nothing's broken." And as she reconstituted the lamp, the glare of it crossed her oval face, with the eyes that were no definable colour, and the loose hair that got in them. As Gracey was not there to convict me, I looked without scruple for the mark on her nose. There it was, sure enough! Only it was a very small scar, much smaller than my first memory of it. I preferred not to admit to myself that I was glad. Discipline had to be maintained.

"What a thundering light!" said I, with a bad choice of language. For the light had swept across my face. I never suspected A. Addison of taking a peep at *me*. It is extraordinary what non-human creatures some young men credit girls with being.

A. Addison stood and looked inquiringly at me, merely deflecting that wandering hair into its place. If I had been told, then, that I was glad that rounded girlish figure had kept so upright in spite of constant stooping over wood-blocks, I should have repudiated the accusation with angry contempt. Now, I am not sure that I was not. "Were you looking for Miss Procter?" said A. Addison.

"Well—I was! But I expect you'll do just as well. I wanted to say something about this block." I busied myself untying the string of its parcel, and was awkward over it.

"Let me do it," said A. Addison. "I shall do it quicker than you. . . . There!" The very pretty hand that had nestled into a corner of my memory, helped by another as deft as itself, had taken the package from me and got at my block before I could vouch, untruly, for the relenting of the knot. "*It wasn't* just coming," she added. And we both laughed, and I began to like A. Addison very much. She was answering my expectation. Why had I an expectation? I know, now, fifty years later.

I began a long lecture on the exigencies of block-cutting; how on no account was any shade to be expressed by hatching; even if I hadn't drawn every line; how the lines must be cut to their full width, and not fiddled away and refined. In fact, if there was a feeling of sniggles and jags now and then, as if they had been done with a chopper, I should be just as well pleased. Likewise



I expressed an abhorrence of tint-cutting, and spoke as if tint-cutters would all come to a bad end.

"All right!" said A. Addison. "Won't you sit down?"

I felt a little embarrassed. What was I to sit down about, so near as I was to exhausting my subject? However, I was relieved when she continued:—"Because if you will, I'll ask if the proof isn't ready of your other block—it must be yours?—the highway-man in spectacles, you know."

I confessed to the highway man, and sat down with a clear conscience. A. Addison departed down the rickety stairs, and I sat there and thought how pretty her feet must look going down them. Presently she came back with the proof. She was so sorry, she said, that Kate Somebody—I think the name was Haggerdorn—wasn't there to hear my criticism. "*She* cut it, you know . . . Oh no, *I* didn't. But I daresay I shall cut this one, because she's going to marry a man named MacDonald." I perceived that this did not point to any special influence of this name, but only to the probable preoccupations of the lady's approaching nuptials. I found as much fault as I could with the print, and expressed an unreasonable expectation that I should find A. Addison's own work much more sympathetic. Meanwhile the fog got thicker. No other woodcutter appeared, and I thought it would be becoming to express regret at the absence of the ruling spirit, Miss Procter. I was really very glad she wasn't there. What did I care for Miss Procter?

"She'll not come to-day," said A. Addison. "She's kept away by the fog. So are the others, I suppose. I get here easily, because the omnibus passes my door."

"Then you have to walk up from Charing Cross?"

"Then I have to walk up from Charing Cross." I felt ungrateful to the omnibus, which seemed to have carried the conversation into an insipid country. But a rescue was at hand. "I shall get home quicker walking, if this fog keeps like this," said the girl. I felt really indebted to that fog.

"How far have you to go?" I asked, quite naturally. Indeed, the question called aloud for asking; it would have seemed almost uncivil not to want to know.

"To my house?"

"To your house."

She stood considering, with the two hands that were of so much interest to me resting their fingers in company on the back of the chair she had not taken, but hiding the thumbs. What little things I find I remember! She was bent on not overstating

that distance, apparently. "It isn't three miles," said she. "Because it's only four to Putney."

"Then it's an awfully long way," said I. Which seemed to me a legitimate conclusion, though I don't see why, now.

"Perhaps the fog will clear." She accepted my standard of consecutiveness.

"But suppose it doesn't!"

"Oh—I shall get home all right."

The thought that hovered on the outskirts of my mind was a daring one. So daring that it only remained there a few seconds. It flew in and took possession. "I say," said I. "I *am* going exactly the same way."

"I've been out in much worse fogs than this." A. Addison's indescribable eyes looked straight into mine with perfect frankness. "But it *would* be nice, of course. Usually, there's Kate, and we go together, because she lives with her mother at Putney. But now it's nothing but Captain Macdonald." I should put in little explanatory bits, for plausibility, if this were not an exact record of a talk I remember well—written down to please myself, not for any one else to read.

Anyhow, neither party, at the time, suspected unintelligibility. It seemed quite plain sailing, a few minor points calling for adjustment. A. Addison was not due to depart, and the fog might clear. Very likely the sun would be shining in an hour, and then the buses wouldn't be crawling. This, I said, would exactly suit me, as I had to call at a shop in Holborn to buy some joint-dividers. This purchase had nothing to do with butcher's meat, but belonged to one of those shagreen outfits that are called compass-cases. I had dropped my "pair of compasses," and it had stuck in the ground and spoiled both its points. This side issue seemed somehow to make my arrangement with A. Addison concrete and definite, while a solemn compact that if the sun came out I should consider the programme cancelled, put an end to any idea—or would have done so had any such idea been conceivable—that anything in the *personnel* of A. Addison was responsible for my offer of an escort. I was to be very obliging; that was the keynote of the performance. And we were both bound over to prayer that the fog might clear, that I might be relieved from the irksome duty of going back to—well!—not to a martyrdom, certainly, in view of those hands and other items already scheduled, to say nothing of a pair of lips I had just taken stock of, and the two rows of teeth that lived behind them.

Oh, how I broke faith about that prayer, and prayed that that

fog should become absolutely solid! How anxious I felt once when a gleam came, and whips began to crack and wheels to take heart of grace! Not that I admitted my anxiety. Oh dear, no! I was even hypocrite enough to hope that Miss Addison wouldn't have to wait long for a 'bus. I hoped it aloud, in order to allow of no doubt about my sentiments.

However, the fog had only cleared a little to get a fresh start, and by the time I had bought my joint-dividers and reached Drury Lane on my way back, it was most gratifyingly rich and juicy, and I was overjoyed to see the public suffering from strangulation. Its bronchial cough left no doubt in my mind that my offer to see A. Addison safe on her way home had its origin in pure philanthropy. I could not be expected to exclude such finger-tips and eyelashes, and so on, from the benefits of a good-natured impulse, merely because they belonged to a young lady whose name I hardly knew. I regret to have to write that I sheltered myself from my conscience behind that slight scar on A. Addison's nose. I recalled to mind that Adeline, now a memory of a remote past, had an unblemished nose. How could a worshipper at the shrine of Adeline be materially affected by a nose with a flaw on it?

Its owner, in a grey merino dress and a warm fur jacket, was just coming out of Knotter's as I turned down the Court. "I was on the point of giving you up," she said. "Only it stopped clearing and got black again. You see, it's just as I said. The omnibuses will have to crawl. Besides, there won't be any room at this time of day. All the people are going home at once."

It was Saturday, and we all know what that means. In those days there was no District Railway to Sloane Square. Even the Metropolitan was only an unfulfilled promise.

"Where do you really live?" I said. For I had never had definite information.

"Parsons Green. That's how I came to know that you were the son of Mr. Nathaniel Pascoe, at The Retreat."

"I didn't know you knew."

"Because I didn't tell you. I'm sorry. Now you'll have to take my word for it. I knew because of this. When they sent us the first block to cut—for *Momus*—I heard it was drawn by . . . a gentleman of your name. Well!—it's not a common name—now is it?"

"I suppose it isn't. But I'm so used to it, you see."

"I wonder if everybody's name sounds exactly the same to them. It ought to." This was a thoughtful speculation by the way, which the speaker's lips dropped a conversational smile to consider.

Her next words were:—"Take care—don't let's get run over." For we had to negotiate St. Martin's Lane, and nothing was visible ten feet off. But we could only have been walked over at the best, or worst. Responsible horses seemed to be sending their frivolous drivers on in front, with detached carriage lamps to attract the attention of other responsible horses coming the other way. Link-boys happy in the possession of a piece of tarred rope were catching joyously at opportunities of misleading wayfarers for twopence. Waifs, who did not know where they were, were supplicating strays to tell them, and were only eliciting a sort of analysis of Space from the latter, when disinclined to admit ignorance. It is very hard to determine one's whereabouts *a priori*.

However, we got across alive, and I picked up the lost thread of our talk. "You were saying," I said, "about Parsons Green, and why you knew my father lived at The Retreat."

"Why of course!" said A. Addison, stopping to say it, and looking at me. "Because I was thirteen when the new people went to live at The Retreat; when my grandfather gave it up."

"Your grandfather!"

"Yes—only he isn't really my grandfather. He's my great uncle. We can't call him that. So we always say grandpapa. Well—when I told him you had drawn a block for us to cut—the last one, you know——?"

"The highwayman?"

"In spectacles. Yes. We talked about whether it was that Mr. Pascoe. And he said not very likely, because that Mr. Pascoe was in Somerset House. . . . Oh, he can talk quite clearly, and remembers things! Only he *is* over ninety."

"You hadn't seen me then?"

"No—or I could have told him what you were like. But he said he thought he recollected you. He called you——". She hung fire for a moment. "He called you the boy."

So this girl was the grandniece of old Mr. Wardroper. And it was then and there, in the fog in Cranbourne Street, that the memory came back to me, in a flash, of how Cooky and I had once walked to Parsons Green to leave a letter for Mr. Wardroper that had been sent to The Retreat. I found I remembered very little of the visit, though I contrived to image my admission at the front garden-gate, and fancied that the housemaid who opened it had said that Mr. Wardroper could not see any one, but perhaps Mrs. Harrison could. I saw now that she must have said Addison.

We stopped a couple of seconds to look at each other and laugh. "I *was* the boy," said I. "I was quite a youngster the last time

I saw him. I saw your mother too. I came about a letter that had been opened by mistake. That *was* your mother, I suppose? I think the old gentleman called her Zillah."

"That was my mother's name." This was spoken in a minor key.

"I am so sorry . . . I didn't mean——"

"Oh, how could you know? Besides, why should *I* mind?"

"If I had known I should have asked differently. That was all." For names only become things of the past when their owners join the majority. We flagged for a moment, for I did not feel intimate enough for sympathy about a mother's death. I thought I should do best to leave the revival of the conversation to the young lady. It was not long coming.

"Yes—my mother and father christened me Adah with an H, after Lamech's other wife. You remember her?"

"Oh dear, yes! We were talking of her only the other day." Which was true. For Bartholomew, by a catechism on Gen. I, had entrapped me into a statement that Abel killed Cain, and I had endeavoured to beguile my father in the same way. He had refused to be taken in, saying that if Cain *was* killed, it must have been by Lamech. Lamech was the Second Murderer in the drama of Creation.

"Just as if you met her in Society," said A. Addison. A laugh at this was interrupted by Leicester Square, or by the intensification of fog which denoted it. We had to feel our way across two slow processions of vehicles through pea-soup, one each way.

"Never mind!" said I, and added groundlessly:—"It's sure to be better when we've passed Piccadilly. But—Lamech's wife?" This was to recover a lost thread.

"Well—that's why I was called Adah. Because mamma's name was Zillah. It wasn't logical, but poor Papa was not a logician whatever he was." The way she said "poor papa" puzzled me. It implied allowance made for *something*; not for defective intellect perhaps, but for some deficiency. Her words left an image in my mind of a man who was nobody's enemy but his own, as the phrase goes. I wanted to ask more about him, and then it occurred to me that I did not know if he was alive or dead.

I could not light on any better way of asking than:—"Are you an orphan?" It seemed less rough than:—"Is your father dead?"

Her answer took me aback. "I don't know. I can't say." Then she seemed to think a minute, before adding:—"Need I talk at all about Papa?" It was scarcely a question asked of me; rather, a



passing thought that had found her speaking, and got itself uttered unawares.

However, I replied to it:—"I'm sorry. I didn't want to be inquisitive. Don't tell me things!" I spoke in the compendious speech I should have used to Gracey, and she seemed quite to understand it. For she answered, "Yes, I won't then;" but presently seemed to decide that she had been too abruptly reticent, saying in a subdued sort of way:—"I have not seen Papa since I was quite a child."

So, there was some mystery about her father—some curtain I was not to see behind! So I left him alone. For what right had I even to feel curiosity, on the strength of an acquaintance not yet three hours old? Piccadilly Circus helped the dismissal of the subject, for there we lost our orientation in the fog, owing to the number of wrong ways open to us, and had to seek help from a policeman. When asked, "Which is Piccadilly?" he answered, "That *was* Piccadilly, over that way, but whether it's 'oldin' on is more than I can say. You might in-quire. Only foller straight across—straight as you can go." A bus-conductor at the corner replied to the same question, "'Ope it is! Fares won't get home if it isn't;" and walked on in a cloud of illuminated steam as a horse-herald.

"You'll see," said my companion, "we shall get home twice as quick by walking." And even as she spoke, the line of vehicles we were already outstripping became a stoppage, and one knows what that word meant in Piccadilly in the early '60s. I suppose that stoppage came to an end ultimately, but it was still an undisguised stoppage when we arrived at Hyde Park Corner. We left it submitting, with derision, to the terms of its existence, and branched off through Belgrave Square. I can recall nothing after this—except of course the two great main facts, the girl I was walking with and the fog I was walking in—until we were nearing The Retreat, when the fog lightened and I became dimly aware of a possible embarrassment. Suppose I were to meet one or more members of my family, how should I account for A. Addison?

Now if I had been a very different sort of young man, I should never have asked myself this question. If I had been less home-bred, more at ease with the world and its ways, I should have seen how easy it would be—unless indeed I was prepared to brazen out A. Addison—to wish her good-bye abruptly with, "I see some of my people. . . . They'll be looking for me. . . . You'll soon be home now," or some such speech. Then, if I had been subtle

and deceptive I could have represented her as a wayfarer, lost in the fog, who had inquired the way to Putney, and would get there. There were many excellent openings for the practice of duplicity, but they were not in my line. I was not a duplex young man.

If I had been, as things turned out, the circumstances might have outclassed me. For when we came abreast of The Retreat, my companion said, as I expected she would, that here we were, and now I mustn't go any farther.

I said:—"All right! I'll only go a few inches farther and then turn back."

She said:—"No, indeed you won't, Mr. Pascoe. I won't hear of it. You're home now. Thank you so very much for protecting me against the fog. It's lifting now, and I shall be all right. But I should still be in that omnibus in Piccadilly if it hadn't been for you. I should have been frightened into it by the fog. And oh, the stuffiness and the choking! So now good-bye, please!"

She was so positive that I had no choice but to obey. But just as I was on the point of taking the hand she held out—not without misgiving that I ought to touch it very formally, on so slight an acquaintance—I saw how she glanced beyond the closed gate of The Retreat, and I suppose showed that I noticed her doing so. For she said:—"It hasn't changed the least."

"You knew it quite well, of course?"

"Oh dear, yes! When I was a child, every Sunday. But I have never dared to go in and look at it, because the gate is always shut."

"Come down and see it now." Could I have said less? We entered and the gate swung to behind us.

"Do the giant hemlocks grow as they used to in the Summer?" said she. "They used to get to such a size, all along the paddock."

I felt that the place really belonged to her and hers, and that we had turned both out. I could not propose reinstatement, so I vouched for the hemlocks. "They'll be good this year," said I. "Because they were bad last. They take it turn and turn about."

"Will they go on doing so for ever? I am such a bad Botanist. I never know these things." I believe I pledged myself to the giant hemlocks, *in aeternum*.

Was that poor stunted remnant of their ancient glory that I saw in the strangely altered home I still could recognize as The Retreat, when I visited it for the last time—was it the last of its race?

These snatches of the past—fragments of memories of forgotten

times and things—strengthen from their mist of oblivion for a moment, then pass away, or grow dimmer as I almost cry aloud to them to stay but for one moment more that I may link them with their sequel. Even so I seemed to see but now the image of A. Addison, standing there in the clearing fog gazing at the house-front she had known so well, and almost visibly thinking how she might ask to be admitted to its interior. I knew *that*, but a sort of *gaucherie* about how I should explain her stood between me and any effort I might else have made to pave the way to the request. I was furtively glad she would never make it; glad of my own confidence in her reserve. I wonder now if, supposing that an indifference I had found it necessary to mention to my Self—an indifference to that oval face and soft thoughtful eyes, to that stray lock of rebellious hair now safe in bondage, to those gloved hands I knew the whiteness of, even to that fur tippet that might have been keeping any other throat warm—suppose that this transparent effort of self-deception had been genuine, should I not perhaps have faced the music, and given my companion the indulgence I knew she was longing to petition for? Should I not have given Gracey leave, mentally, to chaff me to her heart's content, rather than—suppose we say!—disappoint this amiable young person I had been good-natured to? I hope so.

But I did not, for reasons best known to my Self; and the last of that image I can conjure from the Past has a wistful, thwarted, slightly disconcerted look as it holds out a hand I am intensely conscious of, to say good-bye. What!—not be unconscious of a hand one takes! How conscious is one of nine-tenths of the hands one takes—those of visitors, for instance; real visitors, who leave cards before their victims' eyes?

We did not part as a consequence of that veiled reciprocity about the crossing of our threshold. I remember, dimly, making a sort of incident of showing the young lady over the rest of the property; and she assented to it and identified things—asked who our neighbours were now, and so on. Then she fled, saying how late she would be at home, and how Grandpapa would think she was lost in the fog.

And as for me, I still suspected nothing! Even though I found that I was, on the whole, not best pleased that the young woman should have shown such a vital attention to The Retreat, on account of a vested interest in it that antedated Me! I am sure I spelt my pronoun, subconsciously, with a capital M as I went upstairs to my workroom.

There, in a sense, I met Nemesis. Gracey, attired as for going out, or just returned, her face brimming over with suppressed raillery, coming from the Studio. And I immediately was aware that she had been looking through the rift in the baize blind at me and A. Addison.

"Oh, you subtle, secret Jackey!" said she. "Now tell me who's the Beauty! I'm dying to know." But she kissed me to show there was no malice.

I affected a doubt as to whom she meant, but made a very poor show. "Stuff and nonsense, Jackey!" said she. "Don't pretend! Who was your lovely companion? Outside our gate just now?"

"Who? Her?" said I, as though I had to turn over in my mind a number of lovely companions to select from. "She's Miss What's-her-name. She cuts blocks—you know—Miss *What's-her-name*——"

"*You* know, and I don't! No, Jackey, it's no use. I'm *not* going to guess, and you'll have to tell."

"Very well, A. Addison then, if you *must* know! She lives over at Parsons Green."

"And you were coming the same way. *I* see."

"Well—there was such a beastly fog. And the omnibuses were crawling——"

"Quite right!"

"And she was going to walk by herself——"

"Precisely!"

"Because her friend that used to walk home with her is going to marry Captain O'Horrigan—or Medlicott, I forget which."

"Captain Fiddlestick! And now she's gone home to Parsons Green. Why didn't you walk the rest of the way with her?"

"Well—you see—she said the fog was clearing, so——"

"So there was no more pretext?"

"She didn't say it that way. She only said I wasn't to come any farther. . . . I say, Gracey, who do you suppose she is? *Really*, though!"

"There—I won't chaff him any more! Who is she? *I* don't know." So I then told her, we being on a footing of reality, of A. Addison's relationship to old Mr. Wardroper; but she was very little impressed by this, as she herself had never seen the old gentleman. She was, however, very much amused at something that hung about my relations with this new young lady acquaintance. What she saw to be amused at was more than I could tell, as I was under the impression that I had successfully concealed every suspicion of sensibility; although I was beginning to admit

that a little might be found in some back cavern of my heart if very careful search were made for it. But really no one—not even my sister Gracey—had any business there except myself.

I was to feel grateful an evening later, to my stepmother for being a Woman of the World. This sort does not chaff and rally and disconcert young men who are or have been grazed by some stray arrow of Cupid. Rather, it takes for granted, that a man is in Love until the contrary is proved; and it is much too well-bred to press for particulars. This indicates the attitude I ascribed to Jemima in respect of the information she received from Gracey about any *affaire de cœur* of mine. And I knew she had been informed about A. Addison as soon as circumstances permitted, one of the circumstances being her mood of resentment at the visit of Dr. Scammony, which lasted well into next day. Which day being the day of my more matured introduction to Miss Addison, and our walk home together, was of course Saturday. So it was on the Sunday afternoon following that Jemima addressed me, speaking over Gracey's head in a we-understand-one-another way that was very gratifying to me in view of its visible influence on a twinkle of anticipative chaff that hovered over Gracey's countenance.

"By-the-by, that Miss Addison, Jackey," said she, with a momentary negligence of her topic to secure a wristband.

"A. Addison?" said I, with a parade of indifference. "What about A. Addison?"

The wristband *did*, at least so the lady decided, now. She returned to the topic which she had left, as it were, waiting. She became luminous and business-like about it. "Are you sure the name *is* Addison?" said she.

"Absolutely certain," said I. "Why?"

"Because of old Mrs. Illingsworth—something she told me about old Mr. Wardroper's grandniece that came to live with him." This was an old lady, our near neighbour at The Retreat, with whom a visiting connection had been maintained by my stepmother and Gracey, although a more self-sustaining communion between the two families had died a natural death after my elder sisters married and departed. I fancy I have elsewhere referred to the fact that there were two young Mr. Illingsworths. Concerning whom tradition, handed on by some one who slept in front of the house, said that one fine morning the Milk, in commune with a friend, had been heard to say:—"There's two young ladies in this here house, and two young gentlemen in that, and what more do yer want?" To which the friend, an older person and more dis-



creet, had replied:—"You 'old your tongue, my man." I resuscitate this from oblivion to give stability to old Mrs. Illingsworth.

"Of course," said my stepmother, the Woman of the World, "Mrs. Illingsworth came here a very short time after Mr. Wardroper, and knew all about what was going on. . . . Oh dear, yes!—she knew Mrs. Wardroper intimately." Then she went on as folk do who turn over contemporary History, somewhat as they read letters aloud, more for themselves than their audience:—"Only I can't make out who the people *were*. I am sure if there had been an Addison in Mecklenburg Square, your father would have known. . . . Yes—thank you!—the little screen, please." For I, perceiving that her fingers were extended to shade her face from the fire, was offering the big screen.

"But what had Mrs. Illingsworth to say about it?" Gracey and I asked conjointly.

"Well—of course it must have been another grandniece, not this Mrs. Addison. . . . Oh—what did she *say*? Why—his grandniece was married to a barrister, who lived in Mecklenburg Square, and did something disgraceful. Only the name was distinctly *not* Addison."

"Now remember, Jackey!" said Gracey, holding up a warning finger to me, "you mustn't say a word about barristers or Mecklenburg Square to your A. Addison. Recollect!"

"Come, I say, G.!" said I. "I'm not altogether an idiot."

"Then, *don't!*"

My stepmother substituted a less truculent version of the same advice, which recognized my non-idiocy. "Perhaps it *would* be better to say nothing to the girl," said she, moderately.

I did not condescend to give a new guarantee of my own discretion. I perceived the desirability of prudence, with nods, but briefly asked if Mrs. Illingsworth had furnished no other particulars.

Mrs. Illingsworth—said Jemima—had been very reticent about the accusation brought against the father. She had only said it was something very disgraceful. I was so minded to think that it was intrinsically impossible that the father of two such hands, such a stray lock of warm brown hair, such lips with such a smile, and such a gravity, such eyes, such teeth, such a total!—could be guilty of anything actually disgraceful, that I dismissed this barrister in Mecklenburg Square as quite untenable. All the same, I could not but recall uneasily that equivocal way in which A. Addison herself had spoken of her father.

Then I remembered that when we first came to The Retreat.

a relative or connection of old Wardroper had interviewed my father about the lease, and had spoken of his sister-in-law, a widow named Addison, whose husband he had never seen. But the entry of this in my book of memory was so ill-written that I went to my father to help me to decipher it. I was quite satisfied with my first interpretation, but later rejected it in favour of the idea that I *must have* recollected the name as Addison, because of the recent appearance of that name on the *tapis*.

My father's memory was very hazy about it. "Are you sure the name wasn't Ridge?" said he. But he recanted Ridge before I had time to reject it. "Oh no, I remember! Ridge was the old chap's son-in-law who brought me the lease. . . . No—I couldn't say. Perhaps it *was* Addison."

I don't think that this was any sign of incipient mental decay in my father. Forgetfulness of a name mentioned in an interview seven years ago!—what does it amount to when all is said?

Besides, he remembered plainly enough some things I had forgotten, but knew at the time. "Ridge was a very close-shaven customer with a shiny hat," said he. "Did he tell me he and his wife's family were at daggers drawn? . . . Well—perhaps not exactly that, but something like it."

"Perhaps he said so when I wasn't there," said I, qualifying a look of incredulity.

"Maybe!" said my father, and smoked placidly for awhile. Then he gave me the benefit of his reflections. "I think I've got it. Mr. Moberly Ridge. Mr. Moberly Ridge said his sister-in-law and her deceased husband—before his decease of course—had lived opposite to us, in our Square. All I can remember about her name is that no one I ever heard of in the Square was called by it."

"I recollect. And The Man had never heard of any such a name." I could recall, and did, as I saw it amused my father, how Mr. Freeman had thought it necessary to reinforce his testimony as to the absence of Addison from the records of the Square, by a groundless incredulity of the existence of any such a name, as an English patronymic. If we had said Handerson, or Anderson, he might have been able to meet us halfway. But when it came to Addison, he could only ask what you was a-going to say next. This he did not justify by any production of a resident Anderson, now or at any time. His remarks turned entirely on the *a priori* recommendations of a name.

"I should have so much liked," said my father, "to be Mr. Freeman for five minutes, to see what it felt like. I suppose, however, if one had the chance of being somebody else, it would

be wiser to jump at the opportunity to be some one with a larger horizon—Shakespeare or Beethoven or the Editor of the *Times*.” We then endeavoured to recall names, plausible or otherwise, of dwellers in the Square in our time, but could not find an Addison. I would not have believed that so large a number of names totally unlike it existed. “Probably,” said he, “old Wardroper had got mixed up about the name of the Square. However, ask your friend Miss Addison pointblank, next time you see her. That’s what I should do if I were you, Jackey.” And then we talked of something else.

Generally speaking, I used to follow my father’s advice. This time I found myself, on reflection, disposed towards my step-mother’s and Gracey’s view that I should do well to hold my tongue about this mysterious vanished parent; possibly a criminal, either in durance or evading the law. “Something very disgraceful,” had such an unsavoury sound about it.

## CHAPTER XLII

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

"'OLD on's the motter," said 'Opkins one early Spring day shortly after this. "Nothin' like it, nowadays!"

"I don't see——" said a dreary student, and stopped. A profligate student near at hand, one who respected nothing in Creation, masculine, feminine, or neuter, said promptly:—"G'yup, Peppermint; what don't you see? Get it sput out, and ha' done with it!" Whereupor the dreary student said again, "I don't see——" and stopped again, as before. His intonation of his last two vowels produced a well-executed echo from the mocker, and an appreciative laugh from his admirers.

"Will you be silent, me boy, and let us hear Mr. Pethersole?" The student who said this spoke with an indication of reverence for the opinion of Mr. Pethersole, miscalled Peppermint, in which there was a trace of ridicule.

The profligate student, in compliment to the speaker, assumed an exaggerated Irish accent. "Will I howld me tongue thin, to oblige the O'Flanigin?" Sure and I will, be Jasus. Arrah thin, Pippermint darlin', spake away and lit the jontlemen hear your melothious accints." And so forth, until invited by a collective appeal to shut up.

The dreary student then, having the rostrum to himself, went on where he had left off, drearily:—"I don't see how you do without Genius."

"Ah now!" said Mr. O'Flanagan. "Give your attention to Misther Pithersole, Hopkins. The wurruds of wisdom! How will ye do without Janius?"

"Poor beggar!—he's got to," said the mocker, whose name was Nixon. "Never mind, 'Opkins my boy! Cheer up, 'Opkins! All in the same boat at this Academy, 'Opkins!" He dropped his consolatory tone for a merely business one. "Anybody here a Genius? Let him speak now or be for ever silent. Don't all speak at once." But every one kept his conviction, if he had one, to himself.

If this were a book, I should have to explain that the profligate student's licence of speech was safely practised by him owing to a physical deformity. It was a universally conceded privilege.

'Opkins felt it incumbent on him to justify his position. "Genius," he said, "is a gift, bestowed by Providence."

"On me," said that *diable boiteux*, Nixon. "What will you stand?" This was an interruption without warrant from its own subject-matter.

'Opkins ignored it with dignity, and continued:—" . . . in fulfilment of Destiny, on worthy recipients 'avin' the correct qualifications. Persons endow'd with Genius are rarer avisses not frequently come across. 'Umbler capacities have to make good by perseverin', which goes a long way. So I say—'Old on's the word."

I happen to remember this scrap of conversation on the occasion of a sporadic appearance of mine at the R. A. The remark of 'Opkins that it opened with was made in response to a felicitation of mine on his steadfastness and persistency. He was not able to compliment me in return, for I must have seemed a *flaneur* without a purpose, coming in as I did just as the model was going to abdicate—to come down off of the throne was her own exact expression. 'Opkins was kind enough to suggest that perhaps I ought to be described—though not as a *rara avis* or person endowed with Genius—as an instance of exceptional aptitood in a particklar line, and indeed of no mean merit. He himself posed as of a humbler capacity, but with a nobler aim.

I think my conscience found a palliative for its uneasiness over a factitious necessity for a visit to Knotter's wood cutting atelier, in this looking in at the Academy to bring away marine stores that had no place among my present working tools. By an odd coincidence I was getting a wood-block finished at the end of the next week, which called imperiously for a personal interview with the cutter. For the making of this programme plausible, I kept the eyes of my soul open to the fact that the cutter need not of necessity be A. Addison. If it should happen to be that young person, well and good! It was no fault of mine. But I was not going to admit the truth—that I was going to Long Acre with a subcutaneous purpose, concealing a possibility of a walk home with a particular pair of hands; and that my seizing the opportunity for a flying visit to the Academy had as little to do with the matter as had indeed the wood-block itself.

Nevertheless I had the effrontery to utilize the Academy in conversation with Gracey; who, I felt, had her eyes upon me.

"Which are you going to first? That's the point," said she. "Is it to be the Academy, or is it to be A. Addison?"

"Just whichever is most convenient," said I, evasively. "I hadn't thought." This last was not evasion—it was mendacity.



Gracey recognized it as such. "Oh, you story!" said she, candidly. "As if you could leave A. Addison walking up and down in Trafalgar Square while you went in for old brushes, which you don't want and never use."

"Miss Addison has absolutely nothing to do with the matter," said I, freezingly. "She may be there, or she may not."

"We wash our hands of Miss Addison," said Gracey, her eyes twinkling aggressively. "I see. And she may be there or she may not! Precisely. But, Jackey dear——"

"But—cut along!"

"If by any improbable chance Miss Addison *should* be there, and the consequences were——"

"I hate that idiotic game."

"I don't . . . and the consequences were that you walked all the way home in Miss Addison's pocket, like last Saturday——"

"What bosh!"

"Very well—bosh then! Just as you like. Only if it happens—bosh or no bosh!—do bring the poor girl in and show her the garden. I tell you I saw her longing to come in, through the window-curtain. Now don't be a goose, but do as I tell you."

My present favourite psychometry is that we have not only a subconscious self, but several subconscious selves—any number!—and that one or two of mine laid their heads together and decided to follow Gracey's behest. Three or four noisier ones, however, insisted on my believing that my instructions would be given to some one else than A. Addison, and that my sole communications with that young lady would be limited to wishing her good-morning. A good large group expressed their repugnance to this possibility, and I am not sure that one in a corner—a poor half-hearted self—did not try to remind me of that waning Adeline of two years since. Anyhow, my subconscious selves were very active all through my journey to town that morning, and only subsided when I reached the Academy, where of course I went first. Then it was that some remarks upon my intermittent character led to the conversation on Perseverance and Genius which I have just recorded.

The small parcel of unnecessaries I brought away with me helped to keep my subconscious selves in abeyance for the rest of my journey to Knotter's. Arrived there I was disgusted to hear that, as a compliment to me, the last block I had left the week before had been taken out of the hands of Miss Procter's department—which was of an educational nature, although her pupils turned out some very fair work—and taken over by Mr. Shrapnell Him-

self. I longed to assassinate Mr. Shrapnell, and was obliged to express myself flattered and delighted. The thought also oppressed me that this great man would cut my block *secundum artem*; and would refine my drawing, and even—to borrow an expression used by 'Opkins in our chalk-drawing days at Slocum's—" 'atch up shadderin'." a thing I particularly wished to avoid.

However, there was nothing for it but to affect rapture at my good fortune, and I hope Mr. Shrapnell himself was taken in.

I felt horribly non-suited as I walked out into Long Acre without having so much as set eyes on A. Addison. I concentrated all my faculties on pretending I didn't care, and perhaps forgot that Long Acre did not care whether I cared or not. I doubt whether any man-in-the-street whom I passed noticed the whirlwind of indifference which I was putting into practice.

The question I now had to consider was how to repossess the entrance to Knotter's unintentionally just at the moment at which Miss Addison had started for home last Saturday. Simply to go for a walk and return in half-an-hour would lay me open to conviction in the Court of my own conscience. That would never do.

A lucky thought! There was my Artist Colourman, close at hand. Not only could I spend any length of time I chose in selecting a purchase, but I could fill out a cool ten minutes in deciding what it was to be. For I was quite unconscious of being in want of anything. The fact is, that the designer in black and white wants but little here below, and cannot make his bill for materials otherwise than short. Wood-blocks were my *pièce de resistance* in those days, as I drew direct on them—with Indian Ink; but a wood-block is always perfect, and the most fastidious could not spin out the choice of a wood-block, even if blocks of every proportion known to Geometry were habitually stocked. They are, however, always bespoke, like boots. It takes such a short time to order anything of two dimensions only. Wood-blocks would not do.

How about a sketching-block, with some unnegotiable peculiarity? An Indian Ink bottle incorporated in its structure in some subtle way, and incapable of departing from the perpendicular! Some one of my many subconsciousnesses vouched for having seen such a one advertised. How fortunate that it should cross my mind, just as I got to the shop! I elected to be in serious want of it.

I walked some distance down the shop—shops have no end, one knows!—and came to an anchor with my back to the entrance, so that I saw no incomer. I inquired for this peculiar sketching-block,

and to my surprise was told that no doubt it was the Non-absorbent Trapezodium I meant. One was produced—but mine was evidently some other Trapezodium, not the Non-absorbent variety. I then inspected more examples of facilities for making Sketches from Nature than the number of Sketches from Nature that I had seen, worth looking at, appeared to justify. I carefully described the contrivance I had in view, and my friend across the counter promised to keep a sharp lookout for it for me. I doubt its ever having come into the market. According to my recollection it would have been possible only to some adaptation of the gyroscope, which is said always to keep a ship's head right, be the steersman never so drunk.

I was inspecting, I think, a recent patent which enabled the artist to cook a light luncheon without suspending work, when a girl's voice, behind me, asked if that was not Mr. Pascoe. I claimed his identity with unparalleled alacrity.

"I saw your back and thought it must be you," said A. Addison. "I thought you would like to hear. So I came to tell you Mr. Shrapnell himself fell in love with your block. And he's taken it away to cut himself. There!"

"Oh—well!—I suppose I ought to be very much honoured and so forth. But I would sooner *you* should have cut it."

"Oh! But why?" A sudden grave perplexity unsettled her safe expression of geniality towards an unconsolidated acquaintance, almost a stranger. This was such an unprovoked expression of faith on my part. "But of course you're very kind to say so."

Young gentlemen cannot be too cautious about the emphasis they lay on the pronoun "you," when addressing recent young lady acquaintances. Of course, when it's Opera, you may do it in your very first bar. But then, in that case you will be pressing the lady's hand to your bosom before the *duetto* part comes. It was quite different that day fifty years ago, in the Long Acre colour-shop. I felt I had made a mistake, and was not at all sure that the lay-figure—carefully shrouded, all but her expressive face, in green glazed calico—had not detected it. But it was impossible to explain that nothing personal had entered into my speech. I never was a dab at excuse-mongering, and my attempt at one this time was lame. "I—I—suppose I should have said 'your department.' In order to keep one style all through, you know! But, however——!" This was dismissal of the grievance, and acceptance of the decisions of Destiny.

A. Addison immediately made the most of my explanation.

"Oh, I see!—you're quite right. The styles oughtn't to clash, and I hope they won't."

I wanted to soften this Spartan definition of the position. But it was quite impossible to weave in a thread of preference for the young lady's own work, because I had seen so little of it that a bias towards it could not seem impersonal. So I stuttered and lost myself, and I am certain that lay-figures set me down as a weak young man.

"Good-morning, Mr. Pascoe! I must run, or I shan't catch my omnibus." This was how A. Addison cut short a conversation which had very little to say for itself, and was halfway up the long shop before Despair and Resolution had settled between them what was to be done.

Resolution had the best of it, and was rewarded by help from an unexpected ally. So obviously was my start from the back-shop a pursuit of the young lady, that a solemn shopman in charge of the more exoteric counter discerned in me a family friend of hers, to whom a mission of delicacy might be safely entrusted. "I think," said he, pointing to an entity on the counter, but ignoring its nature, "the lady is leaving something behind. Perhaps you." He seemed content to stop here, and I was content to accept his punctuation. I caught up a palpable button-hook—with nothing about it that wanted a veil drawn over it—and pursued its owner down Long Acre.

I seem to have to throw Memory back—so vividly does this incident of fifty years ago come to me now—to summon from the past my last slow progress down that street, some two years since at most. But it comes, and I am again an old man young enough for his heart to break a little still at the past that comes back to him then—the past of his early manhood, when all the fulness of his life was still to come. Some passerby may have wondered then why tears were running down a chance old face. I wonder too a little now—what does it all matter? What did it matter then? Just one life, and one past, among millions. And so soon one utter blank, among billions; one oblivion, lost in a boundless void.

And yet how strange is the thread of memory that brings back the self-same recollection that came back to me then of that button-hook, and made my heart ache with a pain I shall never feel again. For I am daily nearer to the end, and each day am readier to praise any Creator that can be authenticated, for his creation of Nothingness and Peace.

I caught A. Addison just opposite a coachmaker's, with a magnate choosing a barouche for his wife visible through the plate-glass window. My recollection is of embossed letters claiming that the coachmaker was Coachmaker to Her Majesty. But I find I cannot recall any instance of one who was not. Perhaps it is only my failing memory.

"It must be mine. It looks very like it," said the young lady, when taxed with the button-hook. "Stop one moment, and let me see if mine isn't here." She referred to the interior of a little wallet or reticule, while both of us accepted apparently the suggestion of a scheme of Society, in which button-hooks were frequently met with, shed sporadically by careless units, as legs by grasshoppers or locusts. "Why—of course it's mine!" said she with a delightful laugh, after examination. "How could it be anybody else's?"

That laugh of hers intoxicated my heart; and Resolution, who had shown signs of wavering, reasserted herself. "I was coming after you to tell you . . . to say—" I began, and then felt it easier to transpose my key, "The chap in the shop gave me that. He saw I was coming to catch you up."

"It must have tumbled out of my bag," she said. "But what were you going to say? Tell me."

"Oh, nothing. Only my sister saw us outside the gate the other day. She said she was sure you would have liked to see inside the house, and the garden—and why didn't I bring you in?"

"Oh—your sister!" She glanced at me with a doubtful gravity, as though some new light had broken. "Should we find your sister on the way back, now?"

"Well—we *might*." I really thought probably not, but the context of circumstances pointed to what I wanted, videlicet more A. Addison, somehow; and I did not feel tied to the apron strings of Veracity. After all, if Gracey *was* out, it would not matter.

We walked on; with the question, I should say, unsettled by tacit consent. Presently my companion, with an odd gravity that had got possession of her, said abruptly:—"It would not take so long, just to see round the garden?"

I looked at my watch, and compared it with St. Martin's Clock, just visible. "Half-past twelve," I said. "One has to consider lunch. That's what you were thinking of, isn't it?"

"Not mine!" said she. "I was thinking of yours."

"We are always late on Saturday," said I. Then a reckless inspiration seized me. Would a hansom be absolutely out of the question?



To my surprise and satisfaction the answer to this was:—"If you'll let me pay my half." But I could not fathom the speaker's manner. It was not exactly colder than on the previous Saturday; perhaps "more cautious" would be nearer the mark. I see now that there had been no time to consider a demeanour when we had that first interview.

It told, in the cab. I suppose there is no truer test of frank unconsciousness towards a personality than the exact place one occupies beside it in a hansom. It is impossible to bisect your own half of the seat impartially if you love or hate that personality. And any little rule of demeanour that one has to enter on life's programme has its effect, *pro rata*. A. Addison flinched towards her side of the cab, past all shadow of doubt. But she wasn't rude to me; on the contrary, she was perfectly cordial. Something convinced me, for all that, that had a cab been practicable on the previous Saturday, there would have been no South Pole magnetism in either fare.

We conversed—oh dear, yes!—all the way to Chelsea Vestry Hall. That is what it was, in those days, when Borough Councils were undreamed of. I remember what follows of the conversation.

"Your sister won't thank me for rushing in in this way, just before lunch."

"Why not?"

"Well—it stands to reason. She's human, I suppose?"

"I should say so. But do inhuman persons thank people for rushing in?"

"Just before lunch? I should say they might. Only I shouldn't call them inhuman. I should say angelic. Because there *are* limits."

"What to?"

"Visitors."

I thought of saying it depended on who they were. I decided that it would not be impersonal enough—in a hansom cab. I doubt if the driver's experience would have ascribed my standard of delicacy to fares as a rule. I did say:—"I'm sure Gracey will be awfully glad to see you." I made it "awfully," as I felt "very" would not carry conviction. Then I smothered possible analysis of my grounds for certainty by a practical tone. "She may not be back. She'll be sorry to miss you." Impersonal enough for any cab, that!—even for a four-wheeler.

"I shall be sorry to miss her. *Very* sorry!" I was glad Miss Addison should be so very sorry to miss my sister, but with just a leaven of misgiving about the reason why. There was the

flavour of an enigma in her tone of voice—slight, but perceptible. She looked grave too, as one who considers outcomes.

"My stepmother will be there perhaps—Mrs. Pascoe."

"Oh, indeed! Yes, of course!"

"She's quite a nice person, you know."

"Oh ye-es!—handsome, isn't she?" This was evidently for the sake of saying something, to avoid saying nothing. At least that was what I took it to be, at the moment.

"I suppose she is, but I don't know. I'm so used to her. You see, she's been on since I was a child."

"On?"

"Well—yes—*on!* I mean—*going*. She was the girls' governess, and my father thought it would do if he married her. So she's Mrs. Pascoe."

"But she's nice?—you like her?"

"She's not like one's idea of a stepmother, if that's what you mean."

A. Addison considered the point, gravely. "I suppose perhaps I *did* mean something of that sort," said she. "One has an idea of stepmothers. But what I mean is—is she the sort of person to be afraid of?"

"Oh dear, no! Jemima—certainly not!"

"What's that you call her—Jemima?"

"A sort of nickname. Not to her face, you know!"

"But it's a name one always . . . always laughs about. Only I can't think why. What made you call her it?"

"Well—you see—her name was Evans, before she married my father. Now she's Mrs. Pascoe. The name Jemima had caught on, and it stuck."

"But *why* Jemima?"

"Because her name was Evans, don't you understand?"

"I certainly don't. Job's other name wasn't Evans, was it?" Her puzzled face arrested my absurd assumption that the two names would seem to her to belong to one another, as they did to me. Then I found I was by no means sure why they did so, and had to go back to find out.

"Let me see!" said I, gradually recalling. "When *did* Jemima come in? . . . Oh, I remember—I've got it! It was in *Sketches by Boz*—Miss Jemima Ivins and Miss Jemima Ivinses friend's young man. Fancy my having forgotten *that!*"

"That was quite natural. One does forget how things began. But about this lady—your stepmother. Is she not thought very handsome?"

"I don't know. She may be. Only who told you? I mean where did you hear it?"

The answer followed reminiscence. "I think it was an old lady named . . . Malkinshaw, I *think*."

"Walkinshaw?"

"Yes—Walkinshaw. I think she called her her beautiful Mrs. Pascoe, and her Helen of Troy."

"That's her name—Helen. Fancy old Walkey! What a joke!"

"But are you sure you are not wrong, and Walkey, as you call her, isn't right?"

"Perhaps she is. Perhaps she's right when she says my ecclesiastical sister is like Elaine, and my quarrelsome sister like Joan of Arc. I should say she was rather a flighty sort of old party. Did she say this to you?"

"I don't know her. It was repeated to me by a friend, a gentleman I know." I have often been reminded since then of the way in which A. Addison said this, by young ladies who have not courted catechism about some collateral gentleman-friend.

I felt I should like this one cleared up—classed and located. I suggested that perhaps I knew his name, if he was a friend of Mrs. Walkinshaw's. But the name Bretherton, drily admitted, left me no wiser. And the young woman's not being quite certain Mrs. Walkinshaw was not some sort of connection was no help at all. That old lady's ramifications were endless. So I had to leave him unravelled, as we had arrived at The Retreat.

On the whole I was not sorry that it was my stepmother to whom I had to present my young lady acquaintance. I felt the management of the position was so much safer in her hands.

"You must feel as if we had no business here, Miss Addison," said she, taking the visitor quite as a matter of course.

"I'm not sure that I don't," was the answer, with a whimsical expression of protest. "Do you mind my feeling tolerant, if I don't say so?"

"How very nicely you put it!" said my stepmother. "When I was a child I was taken to an old house of ours, and I believe I wanted to bundle the new tenants out. But I love going back into a den one has lived in. I felt quite jealous once when this young man got in at our old house at the Square, and saw all over it."

A. Addison was just asking what Square was that, when I became aware of Raynes, fraught with a communication to me. I said yes—what was it? It was Mr. Stauffer, come to try on. I showed

impatience, but Jemima said:—"Nonsense, Jackey, you told the man to come. Go and be tried on. I'll take Miss . . . Addison into the garden." The pause on the name was just enough to show that the speaker, though moved by courtesy, was not concerned with the identity of her guest, though technically quite aware of it. I went away to be tried on.

When Mr. Stauffer had drawn enough French Chalk memoranda on an accidental sartorial *pourparler* he had brought with him, to enable him to construct a definite misfit, I returned to the two ladies, expecting to join them in the garden. I was rather surprised to find them conversing, apparently with interest, on the sofa in the drawing-room.

"Oh—here he is!" said my stepmother.

"Were you talking about me?" said I.

"There now!—isn't that exactly like a young man, Miss Addison? They are so vain they think that no one can think of anybody else." This seemed to me unfair, as Jemima's words as I came into the room were a reference to me. She continued:—"Oh dear, no—we were talking of some one *much more interesting*." She underlined these words, so to speak, that Europe might understand that the interest involved a young lady and gentleman. She appeared to check her speech in response to a half-appealing deprecatory look from her visitor, saying in extenuation:—"Oh no—I shall not say a *single word more*. I am *discretion itself*!"

I think A. Addison was just beginning, "Not on my account!" when the door-knock fructified, and Gracey came in and was pleasant. But she afterwards said to me:—"Why was your new ladylove so discomposed? She was what Cook calls 'all of a hur' But she's a dear, I quite agree."

We went in the garden, and Miss Addison identified landmarks of her early days. Still, there was a chill of some sort; and in my mind a horrible misgiving, which I was fighting off as best I might; keeping always in view, as the necessity of the moment, the pretence that no such misgiving existed. I think I must have been improving at this date, for I remember an interlinear wish in my mind's manuscript—a desire to protect Gracey from a disappointment on my behalf.

I had not long to wait for my own. My stepmother had the situation well in hand, and I can still think with gratitude of the way she managed it. A. Addison departed, with a cordial shake of the hand for each of us, and a word or two more of congratulation to me on the great good fortune that had befallen my wood-

block, promoted to the honour of being cut by Mr. Shrapnell Himself. Much I cared!

Gracey said, after her words just put on record:—"Tell me about her afterwards, Jackey darling. I must go and wash now furiously, or I shan't be fit for lunch, because of those children." This referred to sundry National Scholars, for the education of whom she had taken service as a volunteer. They were, she said, good but stuffy; and called for soap and water in earnest, to wash them off.

My stepmother, unsaturated with school children, could take her time. She was tainted with nothing worse than shopping among the better sort. New fabrics, to grace that sort, have a flavour certainly, but it is a flavour of cleanness.

She did not look at me, after Gracey's departure to scour, but grappled with some hook-and-eye difficulty she had to keep her chin clear of to liberate her throat; a throat Time had not ravaged, so far. The perverseness of this fastening called for intermittent censure throughout a fragmentary conversation on our recent visitor.

"Oh dear!—girls and their love affairs! . . . Really the people that make these things are downright idiots——"

"Suppose you let me try. You can't see."

"No—you'll only make it worse. There's nothing for it but patience. . . . Fancy that girl telling me——!" The hook-and-eye had the best of it here, but it was of service. It gave me the opportunity of showing no curiosity, ostentatiously; and Jemima the machinery for betraying no suspicion that I had any cause for it. Neither of us was deceived, but each was at liberty to ascribe faith in successful dissimulation to the other. That did as well.

I concentrated on the peccant hook, or eye. "It's flattened," I said. "It wants a knife to open it."

"Thank you!" said Jemima, "and cut my throat! . . . There! it's come at last. . . . What was I saying? Oh—fancy that girl telling me all about her engagement!"

"What!—A. Addison? Who's A. Addison engaged to? Who's the lucky man?" I think this last question was a failure. It was too ambitious. It did not matter. My stepmother's accepted rôle was that of blindness.

For all that, I caught her eyes resting on me for a moment. "Nobody one knows," said she. "I can't remember the name. I daresay I shall directly. Carry my cloak up for me, that's a good boy! . . . No—I'll take the parcel. You'll crush it."



And we both of us felt—at least I am sure *I* did—that we were doing it beautifully!

The frame of mind of a young man who, conceiving that he has just lighted on a prey for his Soul, finds he has been proposing to devour another man's banquet, has no name for it that I can supply. I do not repent of this description of the state of unreasoning perturbation into which I was thrown by discovering that a girl whom I had a fancy for wasn't for me, but for somebody else. The strangest thing about it was, that up to the moment of this discovery, I was quite in the dark about the degree of her importance to me. She had leapt into imperial power over my heart, absolutely unconsciously to herself, in the course of one or two interviews; and the fatal truth had been sprung upon me that the hand that had dwelt in my memory, the wandering locks it had kept in their proper place, the long-lashed eyes whose colour I could find no name for, the lips that made each unconsidered trifle of speech a thing to recollect—that these things one and all *were* my Universe; and that all that I had counted mine before was but as dust in the balance, mere flotsam in the stream of life. And yet, up to that moment, had I been told of what was in store for me, by Omniscience itself, I should have discredited my informant, and told him—or it—to mind his or its own business.

I could now understand, plainly, that psychological moment in the Artist Colourman's, when my expression of regret that my block had been given over to a master hand by A. Addison produced on her face that sudden unsettled look of doubt. I could see that a new light had broken on her, causing her to say to herself, probably:—"Oh dear!—here's another. How is this deserving young man, whom really I scarcely know, to be headed off in time to save me from responsibility for his peace of mind?" I could see that the readiness with which she accepted the gloss I then made use of to cover my speech was no more than a working expedient to lubricate chat and avert a catastrophe of mutual consciousness. I discerned further what that "Oh—your sister!" had meant. She had seen a possible way out of the wood. How much easier to breathe the truth to an aspirant's sister than to himself! It was all accounted for—that stinted acceptance of her position in the cab, and all!

I have since come to the knowledge that girls have little difficulty in warning off young men who approach them with discretion and caution. When the repulse is gradual, it is always doubtful which is responsible, and no one's *amour propre* suffers. When on the

contrary a young man begins making love—I am repeating words since used to me by a young lady—like a Mad Bull, and not like a Reasonable Christian, what can one do? I am afraid that I perhaps erred in the direction indicated. Fancy saying “You” with a capital letter, to a girl on so short an acquaintance! But was it possible for A. Addison to say:—“Keep your pronouns to yourself! I love another?”

Gracey, freed from the flavour of her National School, was on the lookout for me, merely rinsed, by comparison, when I came down to lunch. She was resplendent and full of expectation. “Well!” said she, with heartfelt emphasis.

I was glad to have a case for well-defined dissimulation. “Well what?” said I. “Cut along in. There’s lunch.”

“No there isn’t. At least, Papa’s not come out of his library. Tell me things about A. Addison. How did you get her here?”

“In an ordinary human cab. You must ask Jemima about her. She’s got something to tell you you’ll be interested in.” I think I succeeded in speaking in the *empressé* way which advertises a sub-intent of this particular sort.

“Oh, Jackey, there now! *Don’t* tell me you’re going to say that A. Addison’s engaged to be married!”

“Get along in to lunch! Here’s the Governor.”

Again, I thought I had done it very well. And perhaps I had. For Gracey afterwards admitted to me that at the time she had no idea I was “so bad” about. . . . Well!—about the girl I afterwards married. My pen hung fire over writing it, just as if I had been writing a story, with a plot and a *dénouement*.

“Who was the very nice-looking girl, who went out about twenty minutes ago?” My father spoke, at lunch. But I think he wanted to change the conversation, which had turned on his persistent inobservance of the regimen the great specialist had sentenced him to.

“She’s a Miss——” My stepmother looked to Gracey for help. Not that, I suppose, she had forgotten the name Addison, but that she was not disposed to admit her recollection of it.

“Addison, but is she engaged or not? That’s the question. What *did* she say to you, Aunt Helen?”

“My dear, I hardly recollect. Something about some gentleman. There always is a . . . Do take the potatoes away from your father, Gracey. They are directly contrary to Sir Alcibiades Rayson’s orders. . . . Well!—don’t let him have two, anyhow. There always is a gentleman.”

My father said:—"It would be rather flat for the lady, without one—a flat engagement!" And Gracey said:—"Do try and recollect his name, Aunt Helen." I think that—for a young man whose nerves were all on edge to hear the next word—I succeeded in showing indifference very cleverly. I still think it was clever in me to say:—"She mentioned some chap, in the cab."

"That was him, of course," said Gracey. My father asked, pertinently:—"Do ladies only mention gentlemen they are engaged to marry, in cabs?" Gracey replied that this turned on what was meant by mentioning. There were ways and ways of mentioning people, and she had understood me to refer to a particular sort. "You meant that, Jackey, didn't you?" said she. And my stepmother made a slight note of interrogation with her eyebrows, and acknowledged my general assent with a we-understand-one-another nod. "Can't you remember the name?" she asked.

Of course I could, perfectly well. But I pretended I couldn't. However, I deemed it advisable a few moments later, when the conversation had wandered away somewhere else, to say suddenly:—"Was the name Bretherton?" As if it had just occurred to me.

My stepmother turned to me to think if I was right—for her conclusion was:—"Yes, that was it, Bretherton."

"Say it again!" said my father. When we had both done so, he said *hm!*—but otherwise let Bretherton drop. Then the conversation provided itself with other topics, for the moment. But I saw by a certain watchfulness in Gracey's eyes that she meant to have an explanation from my father, after that *hm!* of why he wanted the name repeated. And sure enough, no sooner had Raynes died away finally than Gracey revived Mr. Bretherton. "Did you know somebody of that name, Papa? Because you said *hm!* You know you did."

"One may say *hm!*" said my father, "and yet not know a person of the name of Bretherton."

"Nonsense, Papa, you know what I mean."

"Well—there was a fellow of that name, who got the sack at the Office. I can't say I knew him. He wasn't any good. Some years ago now. . . . Never mind him! Impossible he should be the same man! Why—that fellow must be going on for fifty now, if he hasn't come to the gallows. Not unlikely."

I think we all felt that, in view of A. Addison's visible early twenties, we might discard this Mr. Bretherton as her possible *fiancé*.

## CHAPTER XLIII

### THE NARRATIVE OF EUSTACE JOHN

I SAW very little alteration in my father about this time, and what I did see I ascribed to his change from active employment to that very unsatisfactory condition, a life of leisure. He was *désœuvré*, and had nothing to fall back upon. After his resignation he kept up for awhile a pretext that now at last he could find time to attend to sundry jobs that had been awaiting him for years past; but none of them seemed to bear examination, unless perhaps it was what he called getting his books in order. He had a fair number of books, and I have never felt my indebtedness to Literature more than when I saw that years of classification might be devoted to the arrangement of a very small library, with a due observance of Method—a proper attention to System. Given both, a folio Classic published at Lugdunum Batavorum, and never opened since it came to Augusta Trinobantum, could quite well be made the subject of a day's industry. There is nothing like System.

I always fancy that there exists a class of venerable gentlemen—I think of them broadly as Rural Deans; but that may be due to a low standard of Ecclesiastical knowledge—who lead blameless lives in the most fascinating Rectories with an unflagging smell of honeysuckle at most times of the year, and Churches with tumbledown pews and no Memorial Windows, and what is better no Funds for a Judicious Restoration; which one hopes, for Heaven's sake, is a source of joy in Heaven. These lives are lives of leisure—learned leisure, what's more!—and these veterans lead them, with smiles and frequent quotations, and a cellar of rare old wine in the background, in spite of the fact that nothing can organize perfection further. They have all the works worth reading, and each has enjoyed a place to itself for a century. They never read any other works. I hope they won't.

These Rural Deans may be a dream of mine, or—like stage-coaches and roadside inns, and The Waits—may have existed once, and now have vanished for ever. The latter, I think; for I find that in the land of my imagination, Dr. Johnson and Boswell go to call upon them, and are received with open arms. That is it,

depend upon it! Learned leisure is a thing of the Past, and has no place at a date that everything has to be up to, if it wants to be Modern. But this date of which I write was still a long half-century ago, when Electricity was little more than a Scientific Recreation; when Research had to cut Subjects up alive in secret, and Flying Machines were very interesting, but couldn't go up in the air; when *Punch* was almost unsullied with advertisements, and London hadn't got to Putney.

My father was unable, in the nature of things, to enjoy Learned Leisure in its fulness, like a Rural Dean, for want of the happy faculty that class—or my image of it—had of recollecting appropriate Passages, and supplying Elegiacs to meet almost any emergency. But he could and did make a considerable amount of occupation for himself out of getting his books in order.

It was a pastime with a drawback, which seemed to me a serious one. There was so often a volume wanting. The moment the deficiency was established, the long line of unread volumes, with indistinct lettering on the backs, that had from Time immemorial occupied their shelf or shelves, and been an unmixed joy to Ignorance, became a thorn in the side of Erudition, who had only herself to blame for looking inside the said volumes. Their previous appearance behind glass was above suspicion, and acquired force from the fact that the bookcase was locked. But the moment that Erudition took—*more suo*—to examining title-pages, and lighted on *Vol: n* of a work of which only *n-1* volumes were visible, all the fat was in the fire; and she was thereafter unable to look upon the same edition of the same work, complete, in possession of a rival bibliographer, without rankling envy and an unholy desire to bone only just one volume, to fill up the gap in her own bookshelf. I recall one absentee in particular, which my father was inconsolable about—one of a series which I am confident had never been read by a living man, until he opened on the title-page of the third volume and looked for the second. No—I am sure that large quarto Rapin—*Histoire d'Angleterre*—had lived on bookshelves, from the day it first found a place on one, till its reader, the only one it had known, discovered that it was imperfect.

Varnish's views on our library were a sort of refinement and intensification of those of any hardened librarian. "Why your par do that pret and that fuss, my dears, about on'y one book in sixteen, and no consideration that there wouldn't be room for it back again, if found, that is more than I can say or ever shall. However another book could be got in he don't give a thought to;



and I say, let alone and be thankful!" The doctrine implied, that books are the contents of libraries, seems to me to be pure unadulterated Bibliography. I had less sympathy with Varnish on this point than on that of the volume chosen. "If they'd 'a took the one at the far end, or the right," said she, "it wouldn't have unevened it anything like. But taking out of the middle was done for spitefulness, anybody can see."

I mentioned this view to my father, to make talk, on the evening of that discovery of A. Addison's position in—or out of—the marriage market. That is what set me off writing all this about his library. He agreed with Varnish. "That's perfectly true," said he. "The thief knew he was taking the edge off fourteen volumes, while if he had abstracted Vol. 15 he would only have spoiled Vol. 16. The reader could have pretended the writer had died just in the nick. Besides, History always gets stupider and stupider, and nobody ever reads more than halfway."

I recognized this as a fundamental truth of the human mind. "Of course!" I said. "Edward the Confessor is heaps better fun than George the Third. We used to like doing Anglo-Saxons and the Norman Conquest."

"Very clearly put!" said my father. "At the same time I read between the lines that you regard History as a thing boys *do* at school. That is a popular view of the case, and one I incline to, myself. All the same, I wish I could remember some of it."

"Can't you?"

My father shook his head slowly, stinting an unqualified assent. At last he conceded the point, without reserve. "No," said he, abruptly, "I can remember nothing, nowadays. I believe it's Sir Thingummybob's medicine. Or the diet."

"You're as bad as Jemima, Pap! She's more sleepless than ever so she says—since she has been taking little Scammony's stuff."

My father was just like every one else about doctors. They were good for other people, bad for him. "That's because she doesn't take it regularly," said he. "Sometimes she misses a whole day. I shall not try the same way with Sir Alcibiades. Because it isn't playing fair, and I'm not a lady."

"Don't ladies play fair?"

"Oh dear, no! They only play a very little fairer than we do—five per cent at most. But I didn't mean that. I meant that if I was caught cheating, I could not carry it off so gracefully as a lady. I should look sheepish." Then after a few moments of

amused reflection, he said suddenly:—"But what set us off upon this?"

"Your memory."

"To be sure. And Sir Alcibiades' medicine. But I *can* remember nothing, nowadays. It's quite true. I've been trying ever since lunch to remember what it is I recollect about that man that's engaged to that girl—at least with the same name."

"Which girl?" I pretended I didn't know; then made believe I had suddenly recalled which, saying:—"Oh yes, I know—A. Addison. What was the fellow's name—Blatherwick?" This was deceptive, as the name was burnt into my understanding, and indelible.

"No—not Blatherwick—Bretherton. You see, Jackey, he's on my conscience. One doesn't like to say a man's a shady customer, and then to feel that one hasn't got particulars, if applied to for them."

"You won't be applied to. It was only us."

"Meaning that it was inside the family circle. I hope that's sufficient. You said she had mentioned his name to you. Didn't she tell you anything about him?"

"Nothing whatever. His context—what brought him in—was old Walkey. He had repeated something she said, about us."

"Complimentary, of course?"

"Oh dear, yes!—all butter. I understood he was a friend of hers; some sort of connection, I think."

My father remarked absently that that old lady was "a family-wamily" sort of person, which appeared to me expressive. He seemed to be trying to revive some recollection, for he once or twice began asking:—"What was that——? Who was that——?" and hung fire over the question. Gracey came into the room, and looked for a book and found it, and then leaned on the back of his armchair. She picked up the last scrap of the conversation, to come into it. "Who was what, Pubsy darling?" said she. For we were like that, at home. Every one was always supposed to be in every other's confidence.

"Nobody *you* know, Miss Inquisitive Chit. Some people opposite us in the Square, a hundred years ago. That's what it seems like—a hundred. . . . Let me see though—you must have been about eight——"

"That's all right. I'm just a hundred-and-eight next birthday. Who were the people opposite us in the Square?"

"I was trying for the name. They used to call and leave cards.

The woman played the piano. The man was at the Bar; it's *his* name I'm trying to get at. It was this little girl's name—Addison—put him into my head. I remembered your dear mamma saying that Mr.—whatever his name was!—had married a Miss Addison. Now I shan't be comfortable till I can think of *his* name. *What* the deuce was it?" His inability to recollect was so evident a discomfort to him, that both Gracey and I cast about for names borne by early denizens of the Square, without any success. I wonder, now, that I did not hit upon it at once. In the end Gracey, seeing that he was really plagued by this elusive name, said she should go and ask Varnish.

Varnish always remembered the minutest particulars of the life of Mecklenburg Square, in our day. My father showed how confident he was of a profitable result by calling out after Gracey:—"Tell her the people who were at forty-six before the Matheisons came." I suggested that probably my stepmother would remember. He replied:—"She might, or might not. But Varnish is sure to."

We smoked peacefully, listening to the colloquy afar, which was quite audible, as Gracey had left the door open. The tone of it spoke of full details and elucidation, interwoven with expressions of surprise from Varnish that any quarter of Europe should be uninformed as to the names and dates of all residents in Mecklenburg Square during its palmy days, videlicet our own; which were to her what the days of the Cæsars were to the Roman historian.

Presently Gracey returned, triumphant and full of information. She came into the room with the name sought for on her tongue's tip, and uttered it promptly, that it should not remain forgotten a moment longer than was necessary. "Fraser!" said she emphatically, adding:—"I knew I should know it the minute I heard it." And my father said:—"Of course:—that was it! The Frasers." He seemed relieved.

Gracey gave us a *resumé* of Varnish's communication. An obstacle had delayed her revelation of the name; to wit, her conviction of the impossibility that any sane person, of the Augustan period aforesaid, should have suffered a lapse of memory on a point so important. "There now, Miss Gracey!" she had said. "You'll never be telling me your par can't remember who it was at forty-six!" To which Gracey had answered:—"Well—I can't, Varnish, anyhow." The reply was:—"No, Miss Gracey, and good reason, too, by token you wasn't out of the nursery when the lady at forty-six visited with your mar. Why, you was not to say

lengthened when the least of forty-six was took over by the Matheisons."

"I feel perfectly certain," said Gracey, "that Varnish thinks the lease of a house has a T in it. There is some idea, I fancy, that it is the least period the landlord will let it for. I know she thinks of him as a sort of ogre who has his tenant in a trap. . . . Well—I ventured to say I could recollect many things before I was lengthened, but the people at forty-six didn't happen to be among them. I think Varnish preferred the view that girls' Memory begins with their grown-up skirts. But if mine did go back to those early days I surely must remember Adaropposite."

"Remember *what?*" said my father. "Is it a thing or a person?"

"It was a little girl, and a very pretty little girl, it seems. I fancy I recollect her nurse bringing her into the Square from forty-six, and that she was the Frasers' little girl. Only I think she liked little boys best, and didn't care to play with us girls. You ought to recollect her, Jackey, for Varnish says you banged her nose with the garden-roller handle, and it left an awful scar. So after that she wasn't allowed to play with any of us either girls or boys."

"Oh yes!" said I. "I remember Adaropposite. I took it to be her christened name, and had to be undeceived."

"What was it?" said my father. "Oh—I see! Her name was Ada, and she lived opposite—on the other side of the Square. How exactly like Varnish! I fancy I remember hearing about that at the time." He dwelt on his amusement at an absurdity, but I could see how the memory of the epoch it belonged to mixed in with it and made his face sad.

For the moment some concern at this held me; but it passed, leaving my mind at odds with some strange complexity of ideas I could not define. The image of the very pretty little girl with the composite name, long forgotten, come back to me, but rather as the recollection of a recollection. For it had scarcely entered my mind when its place was usurped by that of my school-friend of old. I could see him as he stood by the unchanged iron railings that kept the Square sacred, listening to my narrative of this very incident of the roller and the nose, and evidently looking forward to his condemnation of it as a flat incident. This was on the occasion of that valedictory visit of ours to the Square when he was on the point of departing for India.

Then came an inexplicable, chaotic intermixture of past and present, for which I could find no reason then, and can find no

reason now, unless I am to suppose an undercurrent of suspicion in my mind, which the very fact of my prompt dismissal of it condemns as untenable. The face of A. Addison, just as it looked at me in the cab, would intrude itself on the revived image of my little victim of over fifteen years ago—would as it were flicker across all continuity of Memory, and make a re-arrangement of the incidents that followed impossible. How was I to formulate recollection of a past I had clean forgotten, when a vivid present flashed into it the moment it seemed on the way to become intelligible? That this was not the result of that scar on the intruding face I am convinced, for I should at once have jumped at it as a solution of perplexity. As a matter of fact I never consciously connected the two things together, and I am still at a loss to account for the phenomenon, except indeed by making a dive into Psychology—or something else beginning with Psycho—where I should be out of my depth. It is moreover a subject which, in conclave with my Self, I have, so to speak, sworn off, because excursions into it never leave me a penny the wiser. Is the experience of others, I wonder, so very unlike mine?

My disjointed dream lasted until Gracey's, "Well, Jackey!" showing that she expected comment from me on the roller incident of my infancy, caused me to shake free of this intrusion of A. Addison, and to set it down as part of my general obsession of her image. I roused myself to say:—"I suppose she *was* Ada Fraser. Only I doubt if I knew it at the time. I *may* have, though, for I remember mixing her up with the things that came in the milk—you know?—what we used to call *frasers*, when we were kids in the nursery."

Gracey accepted this memory with gravity, as a thing perfectly natural. "Yes—of course they were *frasers*!" Then, as if she doubted the word for the first time:—"They are, aren't they?"

"Not in the dictionary!" said my father. "I think I can answer for that, without looking."

Gracey seemed hurt. "But they *are* *frasers*," she said. "Naturally. One only has to look at them, to see."

I confirmed this; and, against two such rooted convictions, my father could say nothing. I continued, a little touched in conscience I suppose, by my recollection of a past enormity:—"I wonder whether Ada Fraser's nose came to rights."

"Must have!" said Gracey. "Think what an age ago it was! She's outgrown it by now, anyhow."

"I'm not so sure of that," said my father. "Scars stick, sometimes. But—about her parents! The little nose-y girl's, I mean."



I recollect Mr. Fraser, and I recollect your mamma saying he married a Miss Addison. Now suppose she christened her little girl after herself, what was her name before she married? There's a conundrum for you."

I was just going to utter the name, when an apparently unwarrantable coincidence stopped me. I simply could not utter the syllables in the face of it.

Gracey was under no such restraint. "Ada Addison," said she pointblank. But in an instant, the oddity of that coincidence had possession of her too, and crept out through her puzzled blue eyes. "Well—that is queer!" said she.

"What is?" said my stepmother, who had come into the room unnoticed by me. "You all seem very much interested. I came to see what all the talk was about." Being told, it seemed to me that she showed less interest than would have been warranted by the circumstances; appearing, however, anxious to get the facts accurately, asking for them twice over and so forth, but yawning slightly over the prolixity she had brought upon herself. When Gracey, as prolocutrix, had ended up, she said drily:—"Certainly a curious coincidence. But one sees the name is a coincidence, because of the nose. If the one, why not the other?" Then she inveigled Gracey away to the drawing-room, urging us not to be so late as we were last night.

My father commented on the attitude of mankind towards Coincidence, calling her Incredulity's maid of all work. She purified the Intellectual Atmosphere of Superstition, but at the risk of disestablishing Cause and Effect. He drew a picture of The Cautious Inquirer on his birthday, "pointing out" that we should suspend our judgment as to the sun being the cause of the dawn. The appearance of the two at the same moment might, for anything we could know, be a fortuitous coincidence. He would condemn his parents' testimony as to the frequency of the phenomenon, as worthless, saying we ought to hear professional witnesses, before jumping to conclusions. Ought we not to take a leaf out of the book of The Cautious Inquirer? Here now was a case in point. What did it amount to? A young woman had the same name as a little girl, and the same surname as the little girl's mother before she married. Well—what of that? Why shouldn't she?

Why not, indeed? Put that way, I became alive to the fact that there was really nothing to account for. Then, clearly my sense of mystification ought to have disappeared on the spot. But it didn't. Something kept it alive, and I couldn't tell what. It was,

however, at liberty to make believe it was extinct, and did so with a fair amount of success. We said nothing further, having got the coincidence pooh-poohed, but I carried it into the drawing-room as a subcutaneous puzzle—a *fourmillement* under my spiritual epidermis.

I felt sure, as we came in, that Jemima and Gracey stopped an earnest conversation, just as one of them said:—"I say—say nothing!" and the other replied:—"So do I." Of course this caused inquiry as to what nothing was to be said about. The reply was that it was nothing that concerned either of us, and that men were so curious.

It gives me pleasure, when I get on a line of revival of the past, to resuscitate the smallest particulars. The foregoing is an instance of an effort in this direction, made without regard to the number of words it called for, or indeed of the chances of their intelligibility to any one except the writer. Not that I can guarantee that every sentence in it, if re-read by my Self, would be comprehensible.

I take it that my father certainly, Gracey probably, and my step-mother possibly, were in the dark about the effect upon me of my short acquaintance with the young woman whose name had been the indirect cause of this conversation. One knows, or says one knows, how a momentary image of a Juliet—a mere glimpse—will light a consuming fire in the bosom of a Romeo. Yet very few of us have known a shaft of Cupid to reach its mark with such a deadly precision. We are generally content to suppose, each one of us, that undying passion is possible to our own nature, owing to a certain Divinity which we are pleased to recognize in both. But we ascribe it with a good deal of reserve to some one else. Nevertheless—and it is odd that it should be so—the greatest readiness to believe in the possibility of a *grande passion* is not found in minds one thinks of as angelic; no youth if he had to choose between an Arthur and a Lancelot with a little consolatory Devil in his heart would make confession to the blameless king. I found that I suspected my stepmother of seeing through me, while I credited my father with being quite in the dark. I cannot trace this to anything but what I describe to my Self as a complete absence of angelhood in the character of Jemima. As for Gracey, I doubt now whether she was not much more alive to the position than I thought at the time; but decided not to talk to me about A. Addison, simply from tact. It is much more probable that I did

not understand her than that she was in the dark about me. The chances are that I was more transparent than I thought.

Anyhow, the upshot of this incident of my enthrallment by a conscientious syren who had headed me off the rocks—none too soon—was that the form of forgetting all about her was gone through successfully by me; and the form, perhaps, of pretending there was nothing to forget, by my family.

I had not the slightest doubt now of the meaning of her conduct after the incident in the colour shop. It was that slight accent I had laid on her pronoun that provoked it, and I could not see my way to blame her, or to devising a wiser course than the one she took. To say to me, on so slight an acquaintance, "Hands off, young man, I am another's" would have been taking too much for granted. On the other hand, to breathe the fact of her engagement to any one of my womankind, who would be certain to communicate it to me, would clinch the matter, whether sister, sister-in-law, or stepmother. She may have hurried the disclosure with a little nervous precipitation, but what of that? I suppose that my manner was too pointed, my impulse too transparent, to allow of wavering or delay. The alarm of fire was too palpable to justify the loss of a moment in despatching the engines.

What was it that had happened, that a young person who but a few days since was no more than a new acquaintance should have wormed herself into the very vitals of my soul? I knew what began it, and I know now. It began with that hand, which its unconscious owner had used to influence hair to keep out of eyes I had never seen; for their lids and lashes were at that moment mounting jealous guard over them, as they followed the little spirals from the wood-block. I left *my wood-block* with the guardian genius of the Studio, and came away without being able to report upon the colour of those eyes; and yet that hand, without assistance from them, had power to entangle my thoughts, and insidiously suggest the desirability of another sight of it. If the owner of the hand had been consciously angling for my capture—a wild improbability—that would have been the moment when the fish bit. He was caught by a hook against which no fish ever struggles in earnest, in a sport indeed where every fish connives at his own landing. But it was Fate in this case—or my Guardian Angel; what do I know?—that played the line; not A. Addison herself, to whom I was merely a person on business, that had come to speak to Miss Procter.

However, there were the facts. There was I, who—as Tennyson worded it in the poem which goes further to describe this frame

of mind than anything else in English, or out of it—who in this stormy world had found a pearl, a counter-charm to Space and hollow sky; who did not accept my madness at all, but resented it, and had much ado to conceal it. For was not the pearl, even by her own will or consent, to pass into the treasury of an interloper, an outsider, of whom I had no knowledge at all; and about whom I had no convictions, apart from the general one that Man has about his successful rival, that he could not be anything but an Outrageous Snob? But I did, I believe, succeed in keeping the turmoil of my emotions to myself.

It was rather ridiculous, but it was true, that I was helped in this, in the principal quarter in which concealment was difficult—videlicet my sister—by the memory of my absurd boyish passion for the National Gallery beauty. My self-respect shrank from the publication of a second unrequited attachment. Anyhow, I did make a very successful concealment. I am sure of it. At least, I am confident that though Gracey may have detected my love-fever, she perceived that I believed her unconscious of it. All the working conditions of Oblivion were complied with.

I think also that I was indebted to the ballad of the Highwayman and the Forger as a shield against detection of my state of mind at this date. I made the most of misgivings I felt—and I did feel some—that I should be involved in an embarrassment when the caricatures of a gentleman I was ostensibly on the best of terms with made their appearance. What made matters worse was that their unconscious original had taken a strong liking to the Artist, of course without a suspicion of the infamous way in which he was shortly to be dished up for the amusement of the readers of *Momus*. It was to some extent my own fault, for I had been weakly trying to hedge against the storm of indignation which I was anticipating, by affecting an interest I did not feel in Mr. Silbermann's utterances on Art. It would have been much better policy to quarrel with him and if possible, set up a grievance against him.

"What I want to know," said Gracey, who was very much interested in this dilemma, of the caricatures, "is—what attitude are you going to take up? You can't pretend to be surprised at his detecting a likeness. Come now!"

"I'm not so sure about that," said I, after reflection. "It may be a way out of the difficulty. I shall talk to Bat about that. It's his lookout, just as much as mine. He's implicated."

"When are you going to bring me your Bat to see? I've never seen him, you know, and I want to. He must be amusing."

"He is—very amusing. But he hates women."

"They don't appreciate him, I suppose. That's men's usual reason for hating women. But won't he come, because of that?"

"I've never tried it on."

"Well—be a good little Jackey, and try it on. To please me!"

I made no promises, but I didn't say I wouldn't.



## CHAPTER XLIV

### THE STORY

ADAH ADDISON had been engaged to be married for the past three years to her cousin Bob Bretherton. They had been play-mates ever since she could remember and when he entered the merchant service, and was to sail on a long cruise to the West Indies, the evening before he left to join his ship Adah had promised that she would marry him on his return. It was very much of an impromptu affair, fostered by the excitement of the moment and though recognized as a future possibility by Adah's mother, she flatly refused to allow the engagement to be announced on the ground that both Adah and Bob were far too young and inexperienced to be sure of their own minds, and that they must wait till the latter returned home again, when after being separated for a certain length of time they would be better able to judge how far they were indispensable to each other's happiness in life.

So Adah Addison wore no engagement ring and was considered by her family to be unattached, but by herself as betrothed, for had she not given Bob her sacred promise to be his wife?

Bob's voyage had proved an extended one. He had been detained first at one port and then at another, and now at last he had written to say that a good business opening had offered itself in Shanghai, that, consequently he proposed to quit the Merchant Service and settle there. He feared there would be no likelihood of his being able to return to England for some time to come, so would Adah be prepared to come out and marry him? He had added that he should quite understand it were she to hesitate about taking such a decided step, and that what he wished was, that she should consider herself absolutely free and unfettered by the promise she had made him. She must decide, and everything should be as she wished. And Adah had decided, she had written to say that she had thought it all well over, and that she felt that under the altered circumstances it would be wiser for both of them to give it up. The correspondence that followed had been entirely amicable, and Adah breathed a sigh of relief as she read and re-read Bob's last letter acquiescing in all her views, and she knew herself to be free again. Yes, they had both come to see

that it had all been a mistake from the first. There was no harm done, no broken hearts, nothing to regret, and then Adah fell to speculating whether that nice Mr. Eustace Pascoe would be likely to look in at the office that morning.

But Eustace John did not look in that morning, nor for many mornings to come. Ever since his stepmother had performed her part and dextrously let out the fact that A. Addison was engaged to be married, the disheartened Eustace John had kept scrupulously away, timing his visits at the office so as to avoid the sight of those beautiful hands and eyes.

A considerable time elapsed and still no Mr. Eustace Pascoe! It then occurred to A. Addison, she being the soul of truth and uprightness, and not, mark you, actuated by any other motive whatsoever, that having told Mrs. Pascoe of her engagement to her cousin she was now in duty bound to tell her that it was all at an end.

Accordingly, one day, she suggested at the office that she could as easily as not leave those blocks for Mr. Pascoe at The Retreat, she was actually passing the door, and it would save him the trouble of calling for them.

No objection being raised to this arrangement, Adah sallied forth, armed with the blocks in question, hoping she might be lucky enough to find Mrs. Pascoe at home.

Now it so chanced that Helen had had a very dull afternoon. Gracey had been out since lunch and no visitors had called, so that when the servant inquired "if she would see Miss Addison," Helen jumped at the interruption to her solitary musings, and A. Addison was received with open arms. Tea was ordered and Adah found no difficulty in confiding the story of her broken-off engagement to Mrs. Pascoe. In fact the visit was in every way a great success.

Not so the blocks however. So serious were the corrections required that Adah found Eustace John actually waiting for her outside the office door when she got there on the following morning. In fact those blocks required so much alteration that hardly a day passed without a long consultation with A. Addison on the subject, and in addition to that, other pressing work of Mr. Eustace Pascoe's caused him constantly to be passing her door of the office just as Adah was leaving off work, so that he could not help but see her home.

In the course of these walks it transpired that Adah really was the Adaropposite of the old Mecklenburg Square days. Her real

name was Fraser, Addison being her mother's maiden name. Her father, it seemed had been mixed up in a most unfortunate money transaction, according to his daughter, he had been more sinned against than sinning, but in consequence of the whole dreadful business, he had had to leave England and go to America to start life afresh under an assumed name. It had not been possible for her and her mother to accompany him, though her mother had always cherished the idea that at some future time they might be able to go out and join him. All this had taken place when Adah was quite a little girl, and it was years since she had heard anything of her father. She did not now know where he was, nor in fact if he were still living. Her old grandfather Mr. Wardroper would never speak of him, and now that her mother was dead all possible link with him severed.

And so the stream of Eustace John's courtship flowed gently on, peaceful and uninterrupted. Meanwhile what of the other inmates of The Retreat? What of good or of ill did the passing days bring to them?

Mr. Pascoe had fondly imagined that when leisure came it never could be irksome to him. There were so many untapped sources of interest, so many things he had always longed to do, yet never had the time at his disposal to do them in. But like many another, now that leisure had come and he was no longer in harness, he felt quite stranded, and found great difficulty in settling down to any fixed employment. Also, there could no longer be any shadow of doubt now about the reality of the head trouble; the fear of which had made him relinquish his post at Somerset House. It was certainly increasing! He found it hard to concentrate his thoughts, and his memory constantly failed him to a very painful degree, and he dreaded becoming the burden to others that he already was to himself. As for Helen with her constant thirst for excitement, and her craving for Society, she found the trend things were taking most trying.

It was clearly undesirable to encourage many people to come to the house. The strain of conversing with visitors was a painful effort to her husband, and moreover distinctly injurious to him—so the doctor had said; and the constant presence of Jackey and Gracey in the house, made it impossible for her to disregard the medical verdict in this respect, however much, if left to herself, she might have been tempted to do so. There was no way but to submit, and in her overpowering desire to escape from herself she sought relief in incessant church-going; so much so that her

stepson and daughter christened her the "P. L. P.," which is being interpreted the Pious Lay Person.

Since that last row royal with Roberta, Helen had seen little or nothing of the Graypers. Shortly after that stormy encounter with her stepmother, Roberta and her husband had started for the continent, the ostensible reason being that Mr. Grayper, who had retired from active work at the brewery, had undertaken some literary correspondence that made touring in foreign parts a necessity, and Roberta who loved travelling, was delighted at the arrangement.

They had been away a long time, wandering about in France, Italy, and Spain, and now at last they were setting their faces homewards, and Roberta had written from Paris to say that they should be back in less than a week from the date of her letter, and would both turn up the following Sunday to lunch at The Retreat.

Helen's first impulse had been on reading the letter, to discover that she was lunching out on that day, but on second thought she felt that she had much better be there, ready to defend herself if necessary. Besides, it was all such a long while ago now. By this time Roberta might be in a very different frame of mind, and quite ready to be friends, in fact she might have forgotten the whole thing! No, better kill the fatted calf! Let bygones be bygones and receive her stepdaughter with open arms. If only Roberta would!!!

But lunch time came and went, that Sunday and no Graypers appeared. Only a short note sent later in the day from Roberta's husband to say that she was ill and he had not liked to leave her and come by himself. He would write again when he could tell them more, but he feared she might be sickening for some illness, as she had been ailing before they left Paris. Another letter arrived the following morning to say that Roberta was no better and that the doctor now thought she might be sickening for typhoid fever, but he could not be quite certain for a day or two. Meanwhile Mr. Grayper was very anxious about her or he would have turned up in person at The Retreat to report progress.

Gracey promptly announced her intention of going to see for herself what was wrong. "She was not to see the patient if anything infectious was feared," so said Helen; and Gracey promised not to, and took her departure.

That evening Gracey returned with the news that it was typhoid; that a nurse had been engaged, but that Bert had begged that Varnish might come and be with her. Gracey had offered to stop

but was not considered experienced enough to be of any real use.

"Of course Varnish can go, better go at once," said Mr. Pascoe.

"Wait a minute, Nathaniel," and Helen stopped him as he was leaving the room to interview Varnish on the subject. "Just remember Varnish is of the greatest use in the house. You would not be nearly so comfortable if she went."

"As if that mattered in the very least," answered Mr. Pascoe, impatiently.

"Yes, but she has no real knowledge of nursing, at all events not of fever cases, and I have. Varnish and Gracey can look after you and the house, and I will go and nurse Roberta. Indeed, I am right. That is the best arrangement. I am confident of it." And Helen was so persistent that Mr. Pascoe gave way and did not attempt to argue the point. In fact it pleased him that his wife should be so anxious to go herself.

Helen decided she had better start at once. Roberta might easily become delirious, in fact delirium was bound to occur as the fever ran its course, and then there was no knowing what Bert might not say. Yes, it was certainly far safer that she should be there! She could get rid of the nurse if necessary, and watch her herself till the danger was past; and Helen gave the order for the brougham to come round as soon as possible. Then she went upstairs to get ready. In less than half-an-hour she had packed all she would be likely to need into her handbag, and calling a hurried farewell to Mr. Pascoe, ran downstairs. She had heard the scrunch of wheels on the gravel in front of the house and knew that the carriage must be there.

As she reached the hall she saw that the front door stood open, and to her amazement a figure passed out in front of her, entered the carriage and before she could reach it slammed the door in her face.

"Varnish, what is the meaning of this?" exclaimed Helen, for it was Varnish's face that peered out at her from the inside of the brougham. "You are not going! It is I who am going to nurse Mrs. Grayper, you are to stop and look after things here."

"I shall not leave Miss Roberta to your care, Miss Gracey said it was me she asked for," then looking straight into Helen's startled face, Varnish added with grim significance, "One in a family is enough! Had you not better tell Tom to start, M'am, or are you coming too?"

"You can drive on," said Helen to the coachman, and she turned back into the house. But her knees were shaking under her.



## CHAPTER XLV

### THE STORY

ABOUT ten days later the family at The Retreat were thrown into a great state of anxiety about Roberta. The reports of the patient's condition grew increasingly alarming, and finally culminated in a telegram delivered late one evening urging them to come at once as she was hardly expected to live through the night.

Mr. and Mrs. Pascoe, accompanied by Gracey started immediately for the Graypers' House at Kingston. Eustace John was expected in shortly and instructions were left for him to follow on at once.

Since Roberta's illness Helen had avoided, first on one pretext and then on another, going to the house. She had always sent to inquire but had never been herself. Now her going was unavoidable, and she thought with a sickening terror of a possible fresh encounter with Varnish.

The drive from Chelsea to Kingston is a long one, and though the horse was urged on to his quickest pace it was a good hour before they reached their destination.

Haggard and white, Anderson Grayper met them at the door. They were too late he said, and his voice broke. She had passed away quite peacefully very shortly after he had sent off the telegram. No one had anticipated such a very rapid sinking. He had sent for them directly the doctor had told him he had better do so. She was quite unconscious at the end and would not have known them even had they been in time. It was all over now! They would like to go upstairs presently. He would go and see if they might come, and he showed them into the dining-room and left them.

Mr. Pascoe sank into the nearest chair and buried his face in his hands while poor Gracey broke down and sobbed quietly to herself in a corner of the room.

And Helen, what of her? Her face was white and set, as she rested her elbows on the dining-room table and shaded her eyes with her hands to hide—no not to hide her tears—but to hide the gleam of triumph that shone in those dark eyes of hers. Death had been her friend, and those lips on which had hovered that fell accusation, would never again threaten the foundations of

her life. She felt safe now! True, there was still Varnish to be reckoned with, considering her strange behaviour the other day, but Varnish, without Roberta to back her was not so much to be feared. Besides, something might turn up, some way of getting her pensioned off away from The Retreat, and Helen's thoughts indulged in the prospect of a future freed from the dread, not of conviction, for that was not possible, but freed from those vague hints that struck terror to her guilty soul.

Silence pervaded the room, no one uttered a word and the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece seemed to Helen's overwrought fancy to grow louder and louder. And as it ticked it appeared to her to say:—"Your time will come! . . . Your time will come! . . . Your time will come . . . !" Oh! would nothing stop the ticking of that dreadful clock! And Helen felt as if she must scream out loud.

At that moment the door opened and the nurse came in.

"They might come upstairs now, all was ready," she said. Mr. Pascoe followed by Gracey left the room, Helen had motioned to them to go first. She wanted to ask the nurse a few questions, she explained, and would come up presently.

"You wish to speak to me," said the nurse, seating herself on a chair on the opposite side of the table to Mrs. Pascoe. She looked very tired but otherwise unemotional. Her collar was white and rigid, and her starched apron rustled and crackled as she sat down.

"You wish to speak to me," she repeated, sleepily.

"Oh, only," said Helen, nervously. "Oh, only just, I wanted to know if dear Mrs. Grayper suffered much?"

"At the end you mean? Oh no, she went comatose and just slept away. They do you know."

"But I mean before that, was she . . . I mean—was she very delirious?"

"Delirious? Of course she was! They always are you know, with high fever like that."

"But . . . but—" inquired Helen, "was she very delirious? You know sometimes one can judge of the degree of suffering that way. Did she rave much?"

"Oh dear, yes," answered the nurse, "raved at intervals all the night. That's what they do when the fever runs up."

"Was it you who were with her when she raved so violently? Of course you would know so much better what to do than her old nurse Varnish."

"Mrs. Varnish? Oh, she was there at times, but of course all the work was on my shoulders, couldn't be off it!"

"And what was done?" . . . asked Helen.

"What do you mean?" said the nurse, sharply. "All the proper things were done! The doctor's orders were carried out to the letter. I can answer for that——"

"Oh, I know, of course that would be the case!" replied Helen, soothingly. "I have every confidence that all was done that could be done. What I meant was . . . What I really wanted to ask you! . . . was if the raving was very bad in her case? . . . If it implied great mental suffering?"

"Oh, it's just the fever does it," and the nurse yawned. "They mostly talk rubbish and kick and toss about when the temperature is 104 to 105, then if it runs up it kills them."

"But do they all talk the same rubbish?" persisted Helen.

"Why, good gracious, no!" and the nurse gazed at Helen in astonishment. Here was a simpleton and no mistake!!

"You don't remember of course," continued Helen, "what dear Mrs. Grayper raved about I suppose? Not that it really matters now that she is at rest. Still, details about any one one loved are interesting! Always must be!"

"Well, as far as I can call to mind . . . but you see I nurse so many, and I never really take much count of anything they say when the temperature is up, well, I had to hold her down so hard, she struggled and fought to get up! Said there was a figure in white holding out its arms to her at the foot of the bed, that she must go to her."

"Anything more?" asked Helen.

"Oh, lots of wild stuff. Shouted murder and something about some one having been poisoned! Then she shouted Jemima! I think that was the name! or Ellen was it? I really did not pay much attention. It was such a job to hold her!"

"And were you alone with her at the time?" inquired Helen, with as sympathetic a tone of voice as she could muster.

"Yes," said the nurse, "Mrs. Varnish had gone to bed, and I thought Mrs. Grayper was settling down quiet for the night, but the fever ran up suddenly. I could not even leave hold of her to get at the bell to ring for some one to come and help me with her! Not that that mattered much. You see we are accustomed to this sort of thing, we nurses!"

"And was that the worst night you had with her? I mean was she ever so delirious again?"

"Oh, I think that night was about the top of it. After that she became comatose, and never rallied!"

"Poor darling," said Helen, pensively. "She always loved thea-

tricals." But Helen's face was ashy white. "And her dear old nurse Varnish," she continued. "How has she taken it all?"

"Mrs. Varnish? Oh, she seems very much cut up, poor old thing," replied the nurse. "I persuaded her to go to bed and try and get some sleep; she never had her things off all last night. If I were you, Mrs. Pascoe, I would not disturb her!"

"Very well, I won't then," said Helen. "Thank you for all you have told me. And now I think I will go upstairs!"

## CHAPTER XLVI

### THE STORY

Poor Mr. Pascoe was very much upset by the death of his daughter, and Gracey always delicate seemed to be more ailing than usual, so Mr. and Mrs. Pascoe thinking change of air and scene advisable, decided to shut up The Retreat and take a house in the country for a few months, leaving Eustace John to shift for himself in London; this arrangement enabled Helen to carry out her plan of getting rid of Varnish. She skilfully manipulated that Varnish should go north and assist Ellen with the management of her ever-increasing family during their absence from town, rightly foreseeing that once there, Ellen would not readily relinquish her valuable services in the nursery, and that the chances were that Varnish would probably remain on permanently, which eventually proved to be the case, thus relieving Helen of the dread of her constant presence in the house.

In the Autumn they all returned to town for Eustace John's marriage with Adaropposite deciding, however, to spend the Winter at Bournemouth, so that life at The Retreat did not resume its normal course till the following Spring. Meanwhile, an attractive house in Chelsea overlooking the river, with a large studio attached to it, had been secured by the young couple, and Eustace John and Adah had settled down to a happy domestic life. The former had plenty of work to do, the only drawback being that the nature of his employment involving weekly or sometimes daily publication, often kept him at his drawing half through the night and was a considerable strain on his powers, but there was no help for it; he had to bow to the inevitable and do the best he could with his art under such unfavourable circumstances.

Eight years have passed, prosperous happy years for Eustace John, marked only by the birth of a baby daughter and the longed-for release of poor old Mr. Wardroper, who, deaf and totally blind, expired at the age of ninety-six.

Meanwhile what of The Retreat; what of good or of ill had those eight years brought to its inmates?

A sort of greyness seemed to have covered them in, Helen's rest-



less spirit found less and less in their daily life to satisfy her craving for excitement. Her nerves were bad, though all fear of detection had long since vanished from her mind, but her self-tormenting ego destroyed the days that passed. As for Mr. Pascoe his memory failed him more and more and his condition was a source of constant anxiety and incessant watchfulness to his wife and daughter. He could not be trusted out alone as the chances were that he would forget where he lived and not find his way home. Not infrequently he forgot his own name, yet he resented being looked after, so that the task of guarding him from misadventure was not always an easy one. And Gracey! poor little Gracey with her limp and the wound in her heart that had never healed! Still young the heavy mantle of middle age seemed to wrap her round and she accepted the dulness of her life without a murmur or complaint but without any striving for upward growth! No talents were hers, nothing to stimulate the brain, and open out the alluring vistas of the intellectual world. In another walk of life where her daily bread would have depended on personal exertion on her part, she would have been far better off; as it was she lived in a cage built round her by circumstance and had neither the power nor the inclination to break open the door and set herself free. Love had come to her, a great strong love in the first bright freshness of early youth, but Cooky's mother with her narrow creed and inordinate love of power had barred the way, and the dignified Jewish lady with the thick lips and the ropes of pearls, who drove daily round the park in her well set up equipage, was blind to the fact that she had herself dug her own son's grave in far-away India, and blighted the life of the girl, who but for her would have been his wife.

Now it so happened that one Sunday afternoon in the latter half of May, Eustace John looked in at The Retreat. Ada, he said, was coming round later in time for tea, but he wanted to have a chat with Gracey first. "Had she by any chance any sort of an old dress made with a sack; he wanted some kind of seventeenth century get up for a drawing he had on hand." Gracey seemed doubtful, and Helen who was reading by the window looked up from her book and suggested that perhaps there might be something of the sort in the old trunk up in the loft over the stables, that came from Mecklenburg Square.

"All of the old admiral's things," said Helen, "are in the trunk. I'll go and see."

"Oh, I don't care for any of that rubbish in them as

well," replied Helen. "You might find something that would be of use, anyhow there can be no harm in looking." And she went back to her book.

"I say, Gracey, suppose you come along and help me to turn out those boxes."

But Gracey demurred at this, she had on her Sunday clothes. "Would it do another day?" she asked.

"No," said Jackey, "I am in a bit of a fix for something to help me out with drawing, and it has to be sent in tomorrow."

"Well then," conceded Gracey, "I don't mind holding the candle for you to see by, but I shall keep a long way off, and you must do the hunting."

A wooden staircase led up to the loft which had no windows in it, so that, in order to throw light on the boxes, Gracey had to stand at the top of the stairs and hold the candle high up above her head.

Eustace John had taken off his coat and rolled up his shirt sleeves in order to face the accumulated dust of years. "It can't be so dirty inside the boxes as it is out, that's one comfort," he remarked as he proceeded to undo the cord and lift the lid of the box nearest to him. It was, as he anticipated, packed with jars containing some sort of chemical substance.

"If there are any old clothes," said Gracey, "they would be under the jars, the man Freeman did say there were a lot of old rags, now I come to think of it, right at the bottom of the boxes put there to keep the jars from shifting."

"Well, let's see what we can find," and Eustace John began carefully lifting out the jars one by one and placing them on the floor of the loft. Then sure enough here was an old coat moth eaten and tattered, then another, and glory be, something of a woman's torn and faded silken attire.

"Hooray," cried Eustace John. "Here we are at last, I must just shake it out though, it's so crumpled I can't make out if it is a cloak or a skirt." And taking the garment in both hands he stood up and gave it a vigorous shaking regardless of the jars at his feet; a corner of the drapery caught on one of them knocking it down, and it broke as it rolled on the floor letting out a stream of dark brown liquid with a curious odour.

"Oh, Jackey don't, you are smothering me with dust," yelled Gracey, and the lighted candle fell from her hand. A loud report followed, and by the time the alarmed inmates of The Retreat arrived on the scene the smoke that had accompanied the explosion had escaped by a big hole blown through the wall. Gracey had

been flung to the bottom of the stairs, fortunately not much the worse for her fall, but Eustace John lay insensible on the floor of the loft. Medical aid was promptly summoned and he was carried into the house, restoratives were applied and after some considerable time he recovered consciousness. He was suffering mostly from shock the doctor said, and his hands and head were somewhat severely injured. He would get all right in time, but he feared it might be rather a long job. And so there was an end to Eustace John's efforts in the fine arts for many weeks to come. And thus it came about that those fateful boxes again asserted their baneful influence on the family that harboured them, for when Eustace John ultimately recovered, it was to find that, not only had all his regular work for periodicals passed into other hands, but that though his sight was in no way injured, his eyes were weak and got very easily tired, so that it was most unadvisable for him to undertake any sort of drawing by artificial light. Indeed, the practice of the Fine Arts in any form was undesirable. Therefore, when an opening offered itself for land surveying in Australia, he jumped at it, rather welcoming the idea of a new life in a new country, and flattering himself that there would be frequent opportunities of returning to England, and that he had no need to fear losing touch with those he left behind him.

And thus it came about that the Eustace Pascoes wound up their affairs in London, and said good-bye to their friends and that Mr. and Mrs. Pascoe accompanied by Gracey went down to Southampton to see them off. And that as the big steamer majestically moved away to the mournful strains of the band playing its adieus to England from the upper deck, Eustace John with his wife and child stood by the gangway waving their handkerchiefs in farewell to the small sad tender that was taking his father, step-mother, and Gracey back to shore, and away out of their lives, though they little thought it, for ever.

And here we too must bid farewell to Eustace John for the present, for this story is the story of the old man's youth and the young man's old age. It is not concerned with his years of strong manhood and prosperous middle life. When we meet him again his tale will have been all but told, and the sands of his glass all but run out.

The great, floating hotel that is bearing him and his family to the other side of the globe is already a mere speck on the horizon, and now it has passed out of our sight.

## CHAPTER XLVII

### THE STORY

NOT long after the departure of Eustace John and his family for the Antipodes, Helen decided to take the plunge and join the Roman Catholic Church. The prospect it held out to her of confession followed by absolution was alluring. She would try it and see what it would do for her. Could she but drink of the waters of Lethe and forget! Then she might rest and enjoy the day that passes. She persuaded Gracey to follow suit, and the two new converts spent much of their time at the oratory attending all the services there were to attend, and faithfully obeying every injunction to godliness that their newly installed guides and instructors prescribed for them.

And the confessional, what of that?

Yes, Helen confessed her sins, confessed them regularly, but of that foul murder committed years ago, she said never a word. Again and again she tried to make up her mind to speak, confess her crime and snatch the promised pardon. But the words would not come.

"Have you nothing more to say, my daughter," asked the confessor, from behind the screen of the confessional one day.

"Nothing, absolutely nothing," ejaculated Helen, with a vehemence that betrayed her.

And again, and yet again she left the church thankful that she had not yielded to the impulse to lift that dark burden from her mind, and tell the story of her crime.

After all was the confessional really as sacred as they said? Was not her secret far, far safer in her own keeping? Besides, was she heartwhole in her faith? Did she really believe in the power of Holy Church, to unlock the gates of Heaven and let the sinner pass? No, better wait! Some day nearer her end perhaps, when she knew she was actually dying! Then would be the time for confession, not now, when who knows? The priest might, probably would, identify her. After all, he was but a human being! And could any human being be trusted? In time her faith might grow stronger, she might come to believe in the reality of the absolution of sins, and accept the claims of the Church, to the possession of binding powers over Heaven and Hell.

Yes, it was best to be cautious! Best to wait! And meanwhile she would do all that lay in her power to encourage the growth of that faith she longed for, and then when faith grew strong, then would be the time to confess. It would be easy enough, could she only believe, but till then let the dark secret be hers and hers alone.

And Helen never told the foul story of her guilt.

Life went on its uneventful course at The Retreat and the years passed. Poor Gracey flagged and grew more and more ailing. It was tuberculosis, the doctor said, and he recommended Bournemouth. Helen would have preferred to try the Riviera, but Mr. Pascoe's health made a long journey, and residence abroad undesirable. Eustace John wrote eloquently about the healing virtues of a long sea voyage, and the advantage of the Australian climate. But before his letter reached England all that remained of poor little Gracey lay buried under the trees in the Bournemouth churchyard, and her earthly career was ended.

Mr. Pascoe lived on for some years yet. His spirit imprisoned in a half-dead shell, found no outward expression. He did not suffer, so the doctor assured his wife, but who shall say when the bodily mechanism is paralyzed what torture the caged spirit may not be enduring.

At last the release came suddenly and unexpectedly, and Helen found herself free! She had nursed her husband patiently and faithfully through these long dreary years; occasional visits from Ellen and her children enlivened the dullness of life at The Retreat, but these visits were few and far between, and since Gracey's death Helen had led a very lonely life. One by one friends and acquaintances had dropped off or died. Eustace John's work had never allowed of his leaving Australia for his long looked-for holiday in England, and there had been little to break the monotony of Helen's existence. She had clung with all the tenacity of the proverbial drowning man to the straw, to the forms and dogmas of her religion, but she had failed to slay her dark ego. No real uplifting faith was hers, and the peace she craved for was as far off as ever.

Now that she was free, now that no home duties tied her she would try conventual life, not the death in life of a contemplative order, that she could not face, but a working sisterhood that would give employment to her restless spirit while lifting all personal responsibility from her shoulders. Yes, unquestioning obedience to rules and ordinances framed by the saints and the great founders



of the religious life, that would be her salvation. That would make her clean and rest her soul, and bring her peace. And so Helen joined the community of the Little Sisters of the Poor, and was known in the convent as Sister Agnes.

The year of her novitiate passed and still Helen doubted, but there was nothing else, no other refuge left for her to fly to; it was the safest thing for her to do, and so she made her vows and took the veil.

Day after day, as she read her breviary and told her beads, and fulfilled the tasks allotted to her, she thought to herself:—"Yes, I have surely done the wisest thing, all this charity giving! All this implicit obedience to the mandates of the vicar of God on earth, must be counted to me as righteousness. Whatever awaits us all in the great unknown this life I am leading will make me safe. It is impossible that now I should have anything to fear."

And as time went on the devout, patient Sister Agnes came to be regarded somewhat in the light of a saint.

One day after a long weary round of visiting the poor, in pouring wet and cold, Sister Agnes returned to the convent too tired and ill to do anything but lie down and rest on the hard small bed in her cell. When the bell sounded for vespers she tried in vain to rise and drag herself to the chapel, her limbs refused to move and Helen became aware that she was very ill.

Then followed long days of acute suffering, patiently borne, then a sudden strange easement from pain, and the sister who was attending her bent low over her head and asked her if now she should summon Father Bentham? And then Helen knew that her last hour on earth was approaching, and a great terror seized upon her.

"How long have I to live?" she inquired, in a voice that shook.

"Not many hours," replied the sister. "It cannot be long now before your sufferings are over, and you will taste of the joys of Heaven. A saint like you, Sister Agnes, can have nothing to fear."

"Yes, fetch Father Bentham," whispered Helen.

And now! Now the moment had come, and in a weak, trembling voice Helen made full confession of her crime.

The priest listened, and deep down in his heart he doubted the truth of her story. "This saintly woman, in her self-searchings has accused herself of a crime she could never have committed. An exaggerated memory perhaps, of some error she had been guilty of in tending the sick had given rise to the whole improb-

able fabrication; but a crime! No, not a crime, it was impossible," so thought Father Bentham as he gave her the full absolution that she hungered for, and administered the last sacraments of the Church, breathing words of hope and forgiveness into her dying ears.

Father Bentham had departed and all was quiet in the cell! The sister in charge settled herself down to watch through the night; she was to call the mother superior at the first sign of any change in the patient, but that was not likely to be just yet, she thought, not, probably before the dawn, and she crossed herself and told her beads.

A dim lamp burned before the crucifix placed at the foot of the bed where the dying woman could see it if she wished without raising her head from the pillow, but Helen lay with her eyes closed, her lips still moved as if in prayer, and for the first few moments after the departure of the priest she felt as if a great wave of Peace and forgiveness had passed over her, encircling her in warmth and light.

And then a great horror overtook her, and she felt herself sinking—sinking away into utter darkness and desolation of spirit. . . . She tried to speak, but her tongue would not utter, and then in her terror she recognized the truth! It was all of no avail. To no purpose had she laid bare the blackness of her soul. The talisman had not worked! She was alone. Alone in the great shadow of death with the heavy burden of her sin weighing her down . . . down into everlasting night. She tried to scream for help, but no sound came. Her dying body could no longer obey the mandates of her spirit and she struggled and fought in vain. Then it was that a great dazzling light struck her, scorching and burning that dark ego, and Helen woke! Woke to grow in pain and all the bitterness of self-knowledge. A fierce burning love and pity for her victim consumed her. And Helen's soul took flight in the great agony of her upward growth.

In the cell all was quiet. So quiet that when at length the tired watcher approached the bed and leaned over the motionless figure that lay on it she found that all was over. That deep sleep was the sleep of death.

"She passed away peacefully," the sister said to the mother superior, "so peacefully that though I never took my eyes off her I was not aware she had gone."

"Ah, she was a saint indeed," said the reverend mother, crossing herself. And she knelt down by the bedside to pray.

## CHAPTER XLVIII

### THE STORY

AND Eustace John? What of that young man's old age? For old age with the steadily advancing years had overtaken him.

They had been long prosperous happy years in the land of his adoption. As time went on he had given up the land surveying, and had become the Editor of a Melbourne paper which brought him in a comfortable income, though he was by no manner of means a millionaire. All went well with him and his devoted Adah in their well-appointed home; one great sorrow had been theirs, the baby daughter they had brought with them from their English home had not long survived her transplanting, and no other child had come to fill her place.

Now in the late Autumn of his life Eustace John was to experience the great overwhelming grief of parting from the wife who was all in all to him.

Suddenly, and without any note of warning, as they sat together in their veranda enjoying the cool evening air after the long hot day, Adah leaned back in her chair with a sigh and was gone.

"Heart failure," said the doctor summoned with all possible haste. "A most merciful and happy ending," he added in his well-meant attempt at consolation.

True for her perhaps! but how about the stunned and stricken Eustace John? The shock for which he was totally unprepared did not deprive him of his reason. Outwardly he bore his loss with composure and apparent resignation. But his mind had become to a certain extent unhinged. A deep-rooted idea took possession of him to the effect that now he was but a waif and stray cut adrift from all his moorings, and that it was not possible for him any longer to have a fixed habitation or home of his own. His work, though he was still as capable as ever of doing it, held no interest for him and in his disordered fancy it seemed to him that he, the waif and stray, had now no right to continue it. Was he not a different entity? He was certainly not the same Mr. Eustace Pascoe who successfully edited that paper. It was only right that he should go, and in spite of all remonstrance from his friends he retired from the editorship, sold his house, transferred his

money to a London bank and decided to return to England. He thought if he could only revisit the old haunts of his youth he might find his real self again and cease to be a waif and stray, and, above all, lose that horrible sensation of drifting away. It was always there just at the back of his brain. Other people stood still and had firm foundations to their lives, he had none. No, he must go; it was the only thing to be done, and he took his passage to Southampton.

It was the end of April when Eustace John embarked. He would arrive, they told him, in time to taste of the severities of an English spring. He must take plenty of warm clothes with him his friends urged as the English summer would strike cold and damp after his long sojourn in Australia.

The voyage was a fine one, and Eustace John spent the greater part of his time lying full length on a deck chair pretending to read and as far as possible avoiding intercourse with his fellow-passengers.

After landing at Southampton and undergoing the long weary formalities of the custom house he found himself at last steaming away in the train to London, the London that he had not seen since he left it full of hope and enthusiasm in the fresh vigour of his early manhood. How small and grimy the huge city seemed to him now as he drove to a private hotel not far from the neighbourhood of Chelsea. He would deposit his luggage there he decided, have some lunch and after resting a little, he would wander out and revisit some of his old haunts.

Then a strange impulse came over him. He had just entered his name at the Hotel as Pascoe and secured his room when he suddenly felt that he dared not remain there.

He must first find that other self, the one he had lost, till then he had no right to the name of Pascoe. Why, he was not Eustace John Pascoe at all, he was a waif and stray. Besides in all the bustle of hotel life he might meet people, people who might ask him questions! questions about himself, no, that would never do, he must find some quiet lodging, where he could remain hidden, and then he could face the problem, solve it perhaps!

He had transferred his money to a bank in the Fulham Road; he would go there first, draw out a sufficient sum to last him for some months; then, when he had found himself he would know better what to do. Meanwhile, he remembered a little Square somewhere off the King's Road, not far from The Retreat, yes, there used to be rooms to let there, that was the place to go to!

Eustace John had no difficulty in finding his way to the Bank,

and after providing himself with a substantial sum of money set out to hunt for the Square, but all the landmarks were gone, and he found himself wandering about among a lot of unfamiliar houses built to meet the artistic requirements of the day. The Retreat had vanished! Ah yes! he recollected now, it had been pulled down and the garden built over. This must be the Square he was looking for; there was nothing changed here, the Square was the same Square he remembered, the same plane trees with their bark peeling off, behind the same dingy black railings; then you went down a street and came to the river, and there was the house that lost self of his lived in with Adaropposite, that was the brass knocker on the door, Adah always knew his knock and used to run downstairs to let him in. What had he done with his latch-key? He must have left it behind! and mechanically Eustace John felt in his waistcoat pocket. Ah, now he remembered, of course no key could be there. It was not his house any longer, he was just a waif and stray wandering about to look for rooms, and he turned back into the square and rang the bell of the first houses he came to with "apartments to let" on a card in the window.

On inspection the rooms would suit him he thought, besides, what did he care, if he could only be in that neighbourhood, that was what he wanted! So paying a month's rent in advance and giving his name as Mr. John Harris, he told the landlady he would be back in an hour or so with his boxes.

On returning to the Hotel the first thing he saw was his own pile of luggage standing in the entrance hall with the large printed ship's labels and the name "Eustace John Pascoe, passenger to Southampton" staring him in the face.

Eustace John stood there puzzled and perplexed as to what he should do. Clearly he must first find that self he had lost, till then he had no right to those boxes. Why, they were all labelled "Pascoe" and now he was "Harris" and a waif and stray!

"Do you wish all the trunks taken up to your room, Sir?" inquired the porter.

"No, no," hurriedly replied Eustace John, "I am not stopping on here, and I will call for the boxes another day, let me have my bill please," and then he reflected that he must take something with him, the landlady at those lodgings he had taken would expect it. Well, how about that old black bag? There was no label on that, and it only contained some old boots and slippers. That would do and he could easily buy a few necessities on his way back to the Square; and, as for the suit he had on why that was worn and



travel-stained and hardly counted, everything else he could leave till he found that lost self, then the things would really be his own again, and he could come back and claim them. So Eustace John settled his account and left the Hotel, carrying with him only the old black bag.

Once settled into his new quarters he commenced his daily wanderings in the neighbourhood. He wished to find the exact spot where The Retreat had stood but the blocks of new houses bewildered him; once he thought he saw behind some buildings a black poplar tree that struck him as familiar. It stood alone hemmed in with palings and fences, on a piece of land still to be built on. Could that tree be one of the poplars with the rustling leaves that grew at the end of the garden? Then what had become of the two big mulberry trees, and the fig tree? All gone! all gone! Oh, if only he could get nearer to that poplar tree! if only he could hear the rustle of its leaves, that might help him, but he could not, it was hopeless it was much too far off, and Eustace John retraced his dejected steps back to his lodgings. Anyhow, that Square was the same, nothing had changed there, it retained its pristine squalor, even his landlady belonged to the type of landlady indigenous to Chelsea. He seemed to know it all so well! Was it a dream? He could not tell, but he fancied he had once knocked at pretty well all the doors in this very square in search of a model of a fair-haired girl who had left him in the lurch with a drawing unfinished, but that must surely have been when he was himself! How he longed to overtake that lost self but it always eluded him! He must be patient and still go on hunting, he could never give it up! But as time went on that self he was so anxious to recover seemed to grow dimmer and dimmer and he wandered aimlessly about day after day till even the memory of the thing he was seeking for faded, and he became in truth a waif and stray drifting he knew not whither.

The dreariness of the climate though he was not aware of it, did much to increase his malady. There were a few warm days that summer when the inhabitants of the Square groaned aloud and lamented the tropical heat of London. Then back again to cold and pouring rain, the exceptional nature of which, if the natives were to be believed, was entirely phenomenal and unprecedented.

Poor Eustace John shivered through the few short months of so-called summer, he was feeling very tired and weak, and as the days shortened into autumn, he spent most of his time sitting by the window watching, watching for something to come, something to happen, he did not know what!!

He began to fear that his money would not last him much longer, he knew he had plenty more at that Bank in the Fulham Road, but there was some reason why it was impossible he should get at it, some reason connected with that self he had lost. In vain he tried to gather up the broken threads of his memory and unravel them, he was lost, quite lost, nothing but a mere waif and stray!

One day early in December he felt too ill to go out and get his lunch as usual at the little restaurant on the embankment, so he went without it. When dinner time came he felt much worse and instead of going out for his dinner he went to bed, it was no use, he could not face that freezing December night!

The next morning he was too ill to get up, and his landlady was urgent that the doctor should be sent for; Eustace John raised no objection, only remarking feebly that all he really needed was to be left quiet. The local G. P. was accordingly sent for with the result that he pronounced him to be suffering from pleurisy, with possible complications, and recommended his prompt removal to the Chelsea Infirmary. He understood the patient had no friends or belongings, and it was impossible he should receive the care his critical condition needed where he was.

Eustace John rather welcomed the idea, so the doctor made all the necessary arrangements for the ambulance to fetch him away without loss of time, and before mid-day the old man found himself lying in the ward at the Infirmary with a nurse endeavouring to prop him up with pillows to ease the pain he experienced in breathing.

For many weeks Eustace John lay hovering between life and death, and when at last he was pronounced out of immediate danger, it was only to find himself a confirmed invalid with the sands of life slowly but surely running out.

"He might live a year or more," the doctor said, "or he might go off any moment. The state of his heart was critical and it was just a chance, it might go either way."

And his mental condition? How had this long fight of his tired worn body with death affected that? It had not changed, he was still the waif and stray with a consciousness of a lost self that he tried in vain to reach out and grasp, but that invariably eluded him.

And the strange thing was that in all this weary time of pain and suffering, he never once thought of, indeed hardly seemed to remember, that beloved wife whose sudden death had been the source and origin of all his trouble.

As the days grew warmer they placed him on a couch near the window where he could enjoy the air and sunshine, and as his bodily frame became weaker, a sort of soothing sensation came over him, and he seemed as he lay in a half-dozing condition, to be conscious of a girl, a girl who was somehow very dear to him. She appeared to emerge in a shadowy way from a great blank space that he could not account for. When he tried to conjure her up, she did not come. He could only watch and wait, and long for her.

One night as he lay in the dimly lighted ward, listening to the heavy breathing of the patient in the next bed, he fancied that that girl's face that he seemed to know so well, bent over him and two most beautiful hands were pressed gently on his forehead, and then he slept, such a sweet sound deep sleep.

"Milk my cows, Judy. Milk my cows, Judy." What was that? It woke him with a start. Why, a wood pigeon of course. They had such a lot of them at The Retreat, and Gracey always declared that was what they said! One got down the chimney once and he and Cooky got it out. How black it was to be sure! And how they laughed as it flew about the room scattering the soot over everything, and Jemima was so cross, because of the new chintz on the sofa.

There it goes again! And the wood pigeon outside the window of the Infirmary repeated its song of "Milk my cows, Judy" and Eustace John listened again, and as he listened he awoke to the memory of his past, and the full possession of his present. All was clear to him, that trouble in his brain had vanished and his lost self was found.

He lay quite still with a sort of strange happiness stealing over him; he understood it all now, and that dreadful feeling at the back of his head was gone, quite gone! But, oh horror of horrors, supposing this was only a lull, a lull before some mental storm that would return with perhaps greater violence than he had yet experienced?

Well, if so let him enjoy the oasis in the wilderness while he could, and Eustace John resolutely thrust his fears from him. What should he do? He was not a pauper! Had he any right to remain in the Infirmary now? Then he thought how dreary it would be for him to leave it. There was Sister Dora and Nurse Aveling, how kind they had been to him, then there was that man in the next bed, the one who had been a cabman, such a nice fellow,

no he did not want to go away and leave them all. They were his friends. True he had a sister still living and a lot of nephews and nieces, but he had never had anything in common with Ellen, and she lived a long way off, up in the north. As for the nephews and nieces, why, he did not know them, they would probably regard an old invalid uncle in the light of a terrible infliction. No, the nurses and the patients in the Infirmary were his friends and he would stay with them. He might offer to pay, but then that would spoil it all, besides, he did not know if such an arrangement would be possible. In a hospital yes, but surely not in an Infirmary. Ah, he had it! he would make his will, and then after his death none of his friends should be the loser by his sojourn amongst them. His friend Turner the clergyman would help him with that. Meanwhile he would ask the Matron to give him writing materials. Now that he had found his past, he was not going to let it slip again, he would write down all he could remember from the very beginning, just for his own satisfaction, and in order to be sure of retaining it. It could be burnt after his death, or stay, he would leave it for Turner to read; he liked that man, and would trust him to make the right use of any confidences he might place in him. But that would not be yet awhile, for the present he would remain the same John Harris, who entered the Infirmary, now four months ago. And he turned over on his other side to sleep and the cooing of the wood pigeon mingled with his dreams.

"Harris seems much brighter today," remarked Sister Dora to the Matron when some hours later she came into the ward. "He is asking for writing materials, it would give him something to do so he says."

Thus it came about that all through the Summer days Eustace John lay by the open window writing the story of his past life.

"What are you so busy with, Harris?" inquired the Rev. Cuthbert Turner as he came to pay him one of his frequent visits, for the old man interested him and he felt curious about his past history.

"You shall see it all one day, Turner," he replied, "but I must finish it first."

The summer merged into autumn and as the days closed in Eustace John became visibly weaker. His writing was an unfailing source of interest to him, but now with the near approach of winter he began to fear he might not live to finish it. After all did it matter much? He was writing it purely for his own delectation, and in that great hereafter to which he was tending, who

knows but that all his life with its failures and many shortcomings would not be spread out before him like a map traced by the unerring finger of the recording angel. If so, why make any undue effort to tell his own tale, he was very tired, he would rest, and that afternoon instead of writing he slept.

The next day he felt rather better and the thought of his still unwritten will recurred to him, "Yes, that he must see to," and when the Matron next came round the ward he inquired of her when Mr. Turner was likely to come again to see him.

"I think, he said he was going away for a few days," she replied, "did you want specially to see him?"

"I shall be glad when he comes," said Eustace John, and he sank back into a doze.

"Do you think he will come today?" asked Eustace John of one of the nurses, the following afternoon.

"Who? the doctor!"

"No, Mr. Turner, I am very anxious to see him before it is too late."

"Matron sent a note round yesterday to ask if he was back," replied the nurse, "they said they were expecting him home almost directly, and that he would be sure to come as soon as he could."

That night Eustace John was much worse. "I doubt his living through the night," said the doctor, and he ordered him a stimulant.

The stimulant revived him considerably and he again asked for Mr. Turner.

"Was there any chance of his coming that night? You see," he added, "I may be gone by the morning."

"He is sure to come and see you as soon as he gets back," replied the nurse, "but I can easily send for the chaplain if it is that you want," and the nurse glanced mechanically at the card hung on the wall at the head of the bed.

Name, John Harris.

Age, 70.

Disease, cardiac affection.

Address of friends, none known.

"Oh no, no, it is Turner I want to see," said Eustace John with more energy than the nurse had believed him capable of.

"Is there any message you would like to leave? I mean in case he does not come, anything you would like me to tell him?"

"Yes, those papers! My recollections! Give them to him! I wish to be buried . . . not as Harris . . . my own name



. . . Pascoe . . . he will find it all there." And the eyes of the dying man closed and he lay quite quiet for a few moments. Then he roused himself again and speaking with difficulty said :—

"Paper . . . give me something to write with . . . my will . . . I want to write. Turner could have done it. Let me try !"

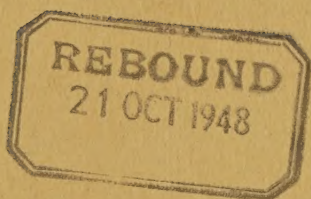
"Shall I try and do it for you," said the nurse, and the tone of her voice showed that she believed herself to be humouring the feverish fancies of the dying man. But Eustace John could not be put off like that ; he made a supreme effort and half-raising himself in bed, asked her "for the love of God to give him pen and paper."

The nurse, startled and awed by his manner, hurriedly went to the locker at the side of the bed and taking out a writing pad placed it before him.

"Give me . . . pen . . . ink" . . . but this time the voice was barely audible.

The nurse dipped the pen in the ink, and placed it in his hand, he gripped it for one moment, then his dying fingers relaxed their hold, his head fell back on the pillow, and Eustace John had passed into the great unknown.

THE END



REBOUND  
21 OCT 1948

